

YPSILANTI
HISTORIES

YPSILANTI HISTORIES

A LOOK BACK AT
THE LAST FIFTY YEARS

EDITED BY JOHN McCURDY, BILL NICKELS,
EVAN MILAN, AND SARAH ZAWACKI

This book is a product of the
Ypsilanti Bicentennial Commission's History Subcommittee.

Ypsilanti Histories

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To the people of Ypsilanti.

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The Bicentennial

A Prologue

BY JOHN McCURDY, BILL NICKELS, EVAN MILAN, AND SARAH ZAWACKI

The Story of Ypsilanti

One hundred years ago, the City of Ypsilanti marked the centennial of its founding by taking stock of its past. A committee was formed to plan observances and to commission a written history of the city. The local chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR) was the driving force behind the effort, although the resulting book was truly a community effort. The bulk of the research was completed by DAR chapter historian Helen Jenks Cleary, wife of the founder of Cleary College (now Cleary University), with the assistance of two professors of History at Michigan State Normal College, Carl E. Pray and Florence Shultes. Several DAR members wrote sketches of aspects of the city's past as did many local teachers, ministers, and citizens. Ultimately, the pastor of the First Congregational Church, Harvey C. Colburn, wove the information into a single narrative, which he titled *The Story of Ypsilanti*.

One hundred years later, the City of Ypsilanti again finds itself commemorating a major milestone, and again, it is time for the community to take stock of its past. In late 2021, the Ypsilanti Bicentennial Commission created a history subcommittee and tasked it with producing a history of Ypsilanti. We have answered the commission's charge and the book that follows is the result of our work.

Much has changed since *The Story of Ypsilanti*, both in the city and in the study of the past. Challenges from industrialization and deindustrialization have rocked the community while the city's commerce has shifted from a string of shops along Michigan Avenue to a more eclectic collection of businesses throughout the area. Efforts to save the city's unique appearance led to historic preservation efforts and neighborhood associations, while new community organizations created opportunities for people to come together. Education has remained central to the life of the city, both at the public schools and Eastern Michigan University, although this has also brought challenges of

desegregation and arguments over mascots.

When the history subcommittee first met, we began discussing the best way to capture this complex history and how to present it as part of the bicentennial. We agreed that a printed book should be the result of its efforts, although we decided that a single-author narrative was out of keeping with the diversity of voices and experiences that make up the city today. Instead, we reached out to various members of the community and asked them to each tell a small part of a much larger story.

We also decided not to rewrite the entire history of Ypsilanti. *The Story of Ypsilanti* more than adequately captured the first hundred years of the city, and these efforts were suitably updated fifty years ago by *Ypsilanti Area Sesquicentennial, 1823–1973*. We thus opted to focus on the last fifty years of the city's past with the hope that what it produced would complement, and in some cases correct, the existing histories. The essays that follow are a testament to the complicated place that Ypsilanti was and has become over the last fifty years.

Ypsilanti Histories

In selecting authors for this collection, we were mindful of the rich diversity of Ypsilanti and the surrounding community. As in 1923, several local History professors contributed essays as did local teachers, ministers, and citizens. Unlike 1923, however, the stories of city council members, business owners, and community organizers were included as well. We also made every effort to capture multiple perspectives on Ypsilanti, especially the experiences of people of color, women, and LGBTQ+ individuals.

Not everyone we asked to contribute to this collection wrote an essay. Many emails and phone calls went unanswered and, thus, *Ypsilanti Histories* is incomplete. Various houses of worship, communities, and individuals who should have been included here are, as a result, missing. We are aware of the absence of essays on Ypsilanti Township and the city's Latino residents, for example, and we hope that they will find ways to tell their histories in the future.

The variety of authors has also led to a variety of styles. While some authors researched archival materials and consulted the historical literature, others drew on their personal experiences and memories. Some have contributed images from the archives of the Ypsilanti Historical Society and Eastern Michigan University, while others supplied their own digital pictures. Most of the authors were not disinterested observers but active participants in the stories they relate. The essays are thus a collection of both the triumphs and the failures that have defined Ypsilanti over the last fifty years.

Without Whom

Ypsilanti Histories would not have been possible without the generous contributions of time and money from many individuals and organizations. The history subcommittee is

especially grateful to the following for making this book a reality:

The first thanks go to the authors of the essays. Each author was tasked with keeping his or her article to under two thousand words, which was not always easy. The authors spent many hours researching and writing their essays, and they did so without compensation.

We are also grateful to the hard work of the two copy editors, Penny Schreiber and Lisa Mills Walters, who read and edited all of the essays.

Fifth Avenue Press, the publishing imprint of the Ann Arbor District Library, designed the book and produced a printable manuscript, without charge. Rich Retyi and Eli Neiburger worked as liaisons with the subcommittee and they deserve special credit for their generosity of spirit and hard work on this project.

The archives of the Ypsilanti Historical Society opened its doors on several occasions for the meetings of the history subcommittee. YHS also provided several of the photographs that are featured in this book.

Funding for printing *Ypsilanti Histories* came from a variety of sources. The dean's office of the College of Arts and Sciences at Eastern Michigan University provided funds as did the City of Ypsilanti, the Ypsilanti Historical Society, and the Ypsilanti District Library. The Ypsilanti District Library and the EMU president's office also provided money and space to celebrate and promote the publication of this book.

Finally, we are grateful to the people of Ypsilanti for their commitment to preserving the city's history. Some might ask why Ypsilanti wants to commemorate its bicentennial, but the following pages make clear that such a question underestimates the richness of this city's past.

About the History Subcommittee

Members of the history subcommittee are John G. McCurdy, professor of History at Eastern Michigan University; Bill Nickels, president of the Ypsilanti Historical Society; Evan Milan, former chair of the Ypsilanti Bicentennial Commission; and Sarah Zawacki, former head of acquisitions, Ypsilanti District Library.

Beginnings

Ypsilanti, 1823 to 1973

BY JAMES MANN

Peoples along the Huron

The Native peoples of what is now southeast Michigan were removed from the region in 1819 under the Treaty of Saginaw. In 1820, the land was surveyed, and thousands of acres were put up for sale by the federal government. In 1882, the boundaries of Washtenaw County were defined.

On April 22, 1823, Benjamin Woodruff, John Thayer, Robert Stitts, David Beverly, and Titus Bronson made their way up the Huron River on rafts to a point about one mile south of present-day Michigan Avenue, where they disembarked and chose the site for their new home.

Here, they would start the new settlement of Woodruff's Grove. "From the bank extended a level plain, with scattering oak timber but sufficiently open to offer no serious hindrance to easy cultivation," wrote Harvey Colburn in *The Story of Ypsilanti*. The men began work on a log cabin for the Woodruff family. By August 1824, there were six log houses at the Grove.

Father Gabriel Richard, the representative for the Michigan Territory in the U.S. Congress, urged the building of a road between Detroit and Chicago. The survey for the road followed the Sauk Trail, the route used by Native peoples for generations. This trail passed Woodruff's Grove a mile to the north, on what is now Michigan Avenue.

The road passed the site of the French fur trading post on the west bank of the Huron River, known as Godfroy's on the Pottawatomie Trail. There had been a trading post on this site since 1760. Gabriel Godfroy, Romaine LaChambre, and Francois Pepin registered their claims to the land with the Federal Land Office in Detroit, in 1809. These were known as the French Claims.

The French Claims were each a half mile wide and two miles long running west from the bank of the Huron River to where Hewitt Road is today. The French Claims were

purchased in 1824 by John Stewart, William H. Harwood, and Chief Justice of the Michigan Territorial Court Augustus Brevoort Woodward. A village was platted on each side of the river, in July 1825. Judge Woodward named the village Ypsilanti, after Demetrios Ypsilantis, hero of the Greek War for Independence against the Ottoman Empire.

The New City Grows

Wooden structures soon lined the Chicago Road on the west

side of the Huron River, as the rate of traffic and westward migration increased. Woodruff's Grove was soon abandoned as the village of Ypsilanti grew in size and population. The first African American families settled in the south end of the village by the late 1830s.

Regular stagecoach service to Ypsilanti began by 1830 and the first train from Detroit reached the community in February 1838. Ypsilanti, no longer an isolated frontier village, was now connected to the world. The depot was located on the east side of the village away from the commercial district.

In 1849, the Michigan Legislature approved the establishment of a teacher training school in the state. The site chosen was Ypsilanti, and it became the Michigan State Normal School, today Eastern Michigan University.

Because most nineteenth-century buildings were made of wood, every city back then had at least one major fire early in its history. The great fire for Ypsilanti occurred on March 28, 1851, in the downtown area, burning fourteen stores, and a lumber yard. New buildings made of brick soon replaced the lost ones. Some of these still stand on the north side of Michigan Avenue, between North Huron and Washington Streets.

A burning issue in the United States during the 1850s was slavery, which divided the nation. African Americans escaping slavery in the American South made their way north by way of the Underground Railroad, an informal network of way stations and routes to freedom. One of these lines ran through Ypsilanti, where escapees found aid and shelter, primarily on the south side of the city among the African American families living there.

Ypsilanti suffered its own divisions during this time, as the two business centers, one



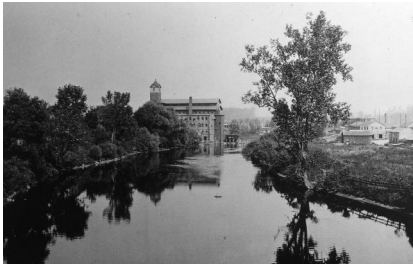
View of Ypsilanti from the roof of the High School building, now Cross Street Village, with the Baptist Church on the left, and the twin towers of the First Presbyterian Church

on Michigan Avenue and the other at the train depot, became rivals. Then, on October 14, 1857, the east side seceded from the west side. The secession lasted four months, when a new city charter was approved on February 4, 1858.

The years of the American Civil War were years of prosperity in Ypsilanti. Despite the national crisis, businesses flourished, new buildings were completed, and life went on. Young men of Ypsilanti and the Normal School enlisted for military service, providing two companies of infantry to the Union Army. As the war neared its end, Daniel L. Quirk and others invested in the building of a five-story woolen mill, expected to produce uniforms for the army. The war ended before work on the building was completed.

Quirk also invested in the Peninsular Paper Mill and dam to the northwest of the city on the Huron River. The mill began making paper in 1868. In 1870, H. R. Scovill, who had volunteered as a soldier in the Civil War, returned to Ypsilanti and started a lumberyard on what is now Frog Island. That same year, O. E. Thompson acquired the building on the northeast corner of River and East Cross and moved the family business there. This is now known as the Thompson Block.

The largest business building project up to this time was undertaken in 1879 with the construction of the Union Block on the northwest corner of Michigan Avenue and Washington Street. The project included moving the Hawkins House Hotel and building the Opera House.



View of the Huron River from Cross Street Bridge with the Woolen Mill of the left and the Scovill lumber yard on the right at Frog Island

The years 1889 and 1890 saw the construction of the most noted landmark in the city, the Water Tower, as part of the community's water system. Now everyone could enjoy the benefits of indoor plumbing. This was a time of innovation and progress as sewers were installed, and the Ypsi-Ann, the first interurban system in the state began

operation. The interurban continued in operation into the 1920s. In time, electric lights would replace gas lighting, and a telephone would become part of every household.

Modernization and Industrialization

The automobile changed society as well as the city of Ypsilanti, as factories opened in and near the city as part of the growing industry. For one thing, almost every convertible top in the world was made in Ypsilanti from the 1920s into the 1950s.

The Ypsilanti Chamber of Commerce was founded in 1920 and asked its members what they believed the city needed. The most popular idea was a new hotel. The Chamber secured property and sold stock to citizens of the city. The Huron Hotel opened on

January 1, 1923.

The year 1920 also saw the passage of the Nineteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, which guaranteed women the right to vote, hold public office, and serve on juries. The following year saw the election of Estelle Downing to the Ypsilanti City Council. She was the first woman elected to the council and may have been the first woman elected to a city council in the state of Michigan.

Ypsilanti celebrated the centennial of its founding in 1923 with stagecoach rides, displays, and a pageant which portrayed the story of the city.

The 1930s were the years of the Great Depression, during which members of the Ypsilanti community struggled, but persevered. By 1940, the African American community on the south side of the city had established its own business district. Segregation was never the law in Michigan, but it was the practice. Many African Americans owned and operated business along Harriet Street, serving this community. The buildings of this business district were demolished during the 1960s as part of urban renewal.

Just to the east of Ypsilanti, in 1941, the Ford Motor Company began the building of a new factory at its Willow Run site. Ford built the B-24 Liberator bomber, a plane that had a huge impact on the ultimate success of World War II. A new factory needs workers but because the men were off fighting the war, there were not enough of them in Southeast Michigan to fill the need. Women began entering the work force, and more workers were recruited from southern states.

The arrival of these new workers and their families created a new problem because there were not enough houses to shelter them all. Some families lived in chicken coops, while others lived in their cars. Temporary housing was finally built for the workers. These housing units were demolished in the early 1960s.



The most noted landmark in the city of Ypsilanti, the Water Tower was erected as part of the city water system, of which it is still a part

Postwar Prosperity and Change

In late 1960, Tom Monaghan and his brother, Jim, bought a pizza store in Ypsilanti called Dominick's and renamed it Domino's Pizza. The business grew from one small store in Ypsilanti to become a billion-dollar business.

One of the great should-have-beens in Ypsilanti is the Greek Theater, which would

perform Greek drama and comedy. After years of planning, the theater opened in 1966 with a production of Aeschylus's *Oresteia* trilogy, with Dame Judith Anderson in the lead role. Bert Lahr came to Ypsilanti to play the lead in *The Birds* by Aristophanes. The two plays were performed on alternate nights for twelve weeks before a total audience of 50,000. While it was considered a success, the theater failed to raise the funds needed to continue and closed after one season.

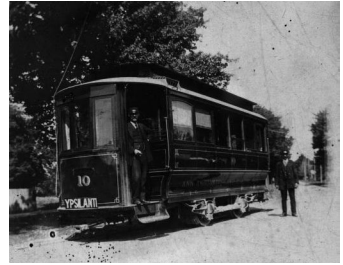
Fear gripped the Ann Arbor Ypsilanti area from 1966 through 1969, as a serial killer abducted and murdered seven young women, including students from the University of Michigan and Eastern Michigan University. This terrible time of fear ended with the arrest and conviction of John Norman Collins for the murder of Karen Sue Beineman, the last of the known victims.

The Vietnam War brought unrest in the 1960s and 1970s to American campuses, including Eastern Michigan University. In May of 1970, student anger about the war boiled over on the EMU campus in response to the murders of four students by the Ohio National Guard on the campus of Kent State University.

Carolyn King was a twelve-year-old girl in 1973 when she tried out for a Little League baseball team. At first, she was turned away because she was a girl, but finally she was allowed to try out for the team. Judged only on her ability, she made the team. But the national office of Little League ordered her removed from the team.



Ypsilanti as seen from Highland Cemetery during the mid- to late-nineteenth century, with the single spire of the First Presbyterian Church on the left, and the steeple of the First Baptist Church near the center, and the Woolen Mills and the Seminary visible as well



The electric Interurban on its first trip

Ypsilanti mayor George Goodman noted the league played on city-owned parks, where everyone was allowed to play. No organization that practiced discrimination would be allowed to use city facilities, declared Mayor Goodman. The city council voted unanimously in support of the mayor. The controversy brought about change to the rules regarding sports and the role of women in sports.

That same year the city of Ypsilanti celebrated the 150th anniversary of its founding with a parade and pageant.

A Note on Sources

Evidence for this essay is drawn from *The Story of Ypsilanti* (1923) by Harvey C. Colburn as well as *Ypsilanti: A History in Pictures* and *Ypsilanti in the 20th Century* both by James Mann. The photographs come from the Ypsilanti Historical Society Archives.

About the author

James Mann is a local historian and the author of ten books on local history, including *Ypsilanti: A History in Pictures*, *Ypsilanti in the 20th Century*, *Wicked Washtenaw County*, and *Wicked Ypsilanti*.

Part One:
Government

Ypsilanti City Council Election of 1978

BY JOHN HARRINGTON

A Council Divided

In 1978, I was a high school teacher at the Regional Career Technical Center (RCTC), the vocational arm of the Ypsilanti Public Schools. We served students from Ypsilanti High School, Willow Run, and Lincoln schools. I was a member of the Ypsilanti Heritage Foundation and owned a historic home on North Huron Street.

At the time the city had five wards with two representatives, each elected every other year. The mayor was elected in a citywide campaign. Everyone had a two-year term. The council was made up of eleven members.

George Goodman was the mayor. The rest of the Ypsilanti City Council had some very notable members like Nathalie Edmunds, Pete Murdock, Jerome Strong, Charlie Kettles, Doug Harris, and Tom Moors. The council was evenly split between two groups, the pro-business and the socialist caucuses. The battle was always raging to see who had enough votes to pass their agenda.

Entering Politics

Eric Jackson had been a city council member in the past and had decided to run again. He had proposed a bill called "Rent Control." The bill essentially said if you were a landlord and had rental property you could not raise rents on your property without permission from a newly appointed rent-control board. The ward I lived in was made up of half student rentals and half property owners. Voter turnout was generally low. The rent-control proposal was being put on the November ballot along with council elections. Many student renters liked the idea of rent control. Most property owners were fearful of more city intervention and greater deterioration of property throughout the city.

Against this backdrop, Nathalie Edmunds approached me about running for city council. I had been involved in East Lansing politics but never as a candidate. Natha-



Personal Background

Property owner

-Family man.

-Teacher at Ypsilanti Public Schools.

-Bachelor of Arts and Bachelor of Science degree from Michigan State University.

-Member of Ypsilanti Heritage Foundation.

-Chairman 1979 of Historic House Tour

lie, George Goodman, and Tom Moors pushed for me to run on an anti-rent control platform. As a property owner and a landlord, I agreed to run.

The first few steps of being a candidate were easy. Getting signatures for the nominating petition, producing a brochure, sending out letters to voters in the ward, and, surprisingly, raising money were all quite easy. The hard part was going door-to-door to visit every voter in the ward. I would try to do two to three streets every night, between six and nine in the evening. My goal was to introduce myself and listen to voter concerns.

The key piece of my campaign against rent control was an opinion letter that was published in the *Ann Arbor News* written by an employee of Eastern Michigan University who had lived in New York City where rent control was in effect. It was very well-written and laid out clearly all the problems rent control caused.

The election resulted in a record turnout in our ward and an overwhelming defeat of the rent-control proposal. I won the election by a two-to-one margin over Eric Jackson, with the largest voter count in the history of the ward. The same Eric Jackson was also a mayoral candidate in a future election.

Reflections

Most of my time on the Ypsilanti City Council was spent dealing with local matters. I sat next to Jerome Strong, and even though he and I were usually on opposite sides of most issues, we became friends. The major event of my time on council was replacing the city attorney Ron Egnor with attorney John Barr, who continues to represent the city today.


My experiences on council were both interesting and time consuming. Working full-time as a high school teacher and grappling with city issues consumed all my time. In the summer of 1980, I moved to Upstate New York to pursue a graduate degree, and I had to resign my seat on council five months before the end of my term. Overall, I enjoyed my time in city government, especially the people I met and dealt with. It is an experience I will always remember.

elect city councilmember

ERIC JACKSON

Human Rights Party For

MAYOR



A Community Activist for Social Change

- * YPSILANTI CITY COUNCIL MEMBER
- * AUTHOR OF CAMPAIGN REFORM AND EQUAL RIGHTS BALLOT PROPOSALS
- * PUBLICITY COORDINATOR, YPSILANTI MARIJUANA INITIATIVE (1974)
- * ACTIVE MEMBER, YPSILANTI FOOD CO-OP
- * STAFF MEMBER, NEW VOICE COMMUNITY NEWSPAPER
- * MEMBER OF PEOPLE'S COALITION FOR JOBS
- * VOLUNTEER WORKER, YPSILANTI TENANTS UNION (1972)
- * MEMBER, YPSILANTI COMMUNITY CONCERNS COMMITTEE
- * MEMBER, UNITED FARM WORKERS AFL-CIO BOYCOTT COMMITTEE
- * ACTIVE IN STATE, COUNTY, AND NATIONAL THIRD PARTY MOVEMENT
- * ANTI-WAR ACTIVIST, CURRENTLY WORKING WITH INDOCHINA PEACE CAMPAIGN

A Program for Action

- * COMMUNITY CONTROL OF POLICE
- * AN END TO POLICE HARASSMENT OF LABOR UNIONS, YOUNG PEOPLE, THE BLACK COMMUNITY
- * ADOPT RENT CONTROL, STRICT NEW HOUSING CODE

Eric Jackson campaign flyer, 1978

As a result of a new City of Ypsilanti charter, adopted in 1994, a three-ward system was adopted that is still in effect today. Each ward has two representatives who serve four-year terms, each elected at two-year intervals. The mayor is determined in a citywide campaign, and he or she also serves a four-year term. Today, Ypsilanti City Council has seven members.

A Note on Sources

Images are provided by the author.

About the Author

In addition to being a member of Ypsilanti City Council, John was an Ypsilanti High School teacher, owner of one of the North Huron Street Quirk/Cornwell mansions, president of the Towner House Restoration Project, member of the Heritage Foundation, Ypsilanti Historical Society and was co-owner, with his wife, of Standard Printing.

The Streams Become a River

Ypsilanti Water History

BY MICHAEL BODARY

Origins

The area's history with Europeans began in 1809 when three French explorers—Gabriel Godfroy, Romaine LaChambre, and Francois Pepin—established a trading post on the west bank of the Huron River approximately 100 yards north of the Old Sauk Trail (now Michigan Avenue). It was also near to the historic Potawatomi trail, and the riverbanks of the Huron were often used by Native Americans for summer fish camps. By 1811 a claim was laid out for four French Claims of 2632 acres.

As settlers came to the Ypsilanti area, wells were hand dug for drinking water, and latrines for waste. As time went on and technology advanced, wells improved by drilling and sinking of driven wells to draw cleaner water from the local water tables. Potable water was mostly derived from wells. The glaciers left water bearing gravel that was used by property owners.

Water Treatment Plants

Drinking water for the City of Ypsilanti was eventually obtained from deep wells. The water was processed and distributed by the Catherine Street Water Treatment Plant (WTP) and pumping station, often through water mains originally made of hollow oak logs. After the construction of the stone Water Tower in 1890, water was pumped up there for storage in times of need.

Originally, most of the drinking water for Ypsilanti Township, much like the city, was obtained from deep wells. This water was processed and distributed by the Bridge Road Water Treatment Plant. In 1972 Ypsilanti Township contracted with the Detroit Water and Sewer Department (DWSD) to provide water to the township to supplement the Bridge Road WTP production; this water connection is known as YT01. The township and DWSD agreed that when DWSD constructed a second water main to the pumping

station supplying the township for redundancy, the Bridge Road WTP would be closed. When the second main was constructed in 1994, water production at the Bridge Road Plant ceased.

Due to the economics of maintaining the Catherine Street WTP, in 1995 a water main was constructed to provide water purchased from the DWSD to the City of Ypsilanti. The Catherine Street WTP was closed in 1996.

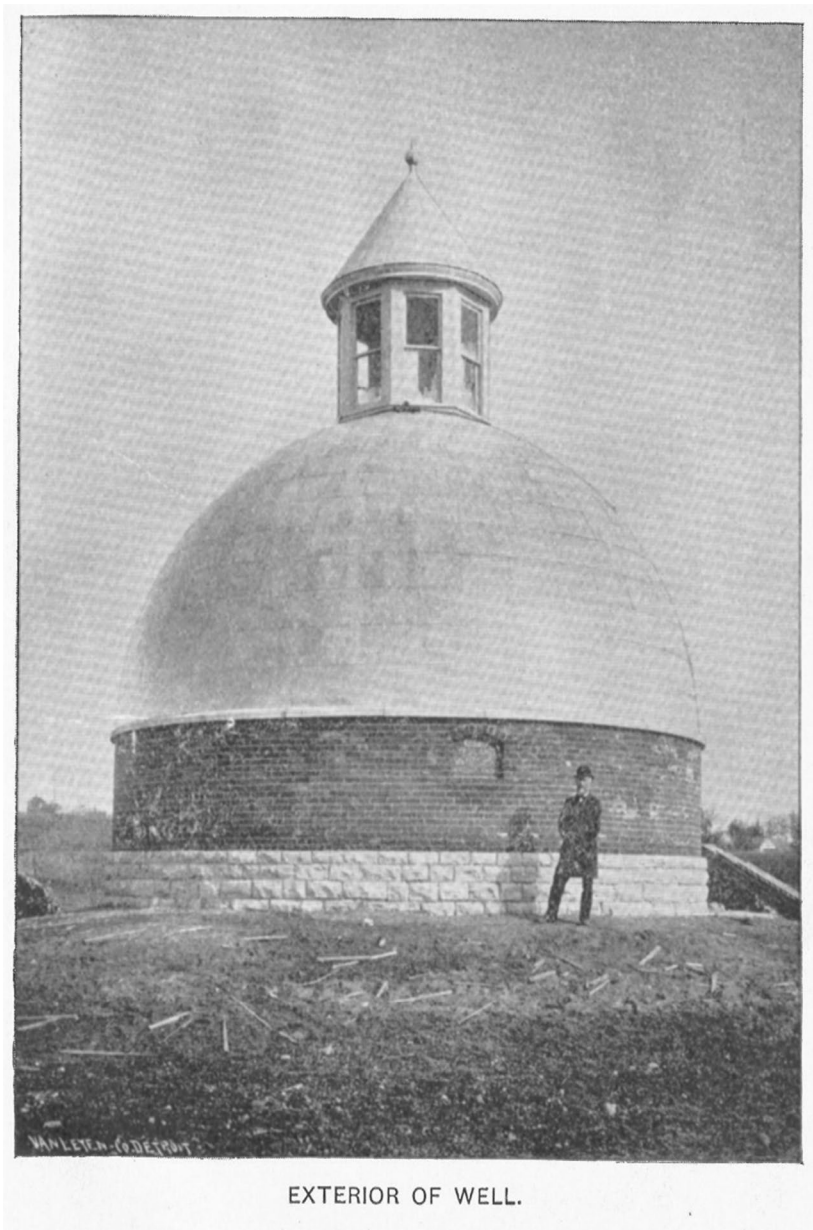
Creation of YCUA

Control of pollutants started to become a concern to many communities along the Huron River and Lake Erie. Algae blooms and growth of weeds began to hinder recreation. Periodic accidental release of untreated sewage happened all along the river. This made sewage treatment a critical need for any type of safe use of the river. Pressure was mounting from the State Water Resources Commission.

The Ypsilanti Community Utilities Authority (YCUA) was formed in 1974. The need for a new wastewater treatment facility was the most significant driving force to bring about the creation of YCUA. The City of Ypsilanti had a treatment facility constructed in 1962, but it was not able to adequately clean the treated water to acceptable standards. Pollution deposits in Ford Lake contained heavy metals and dangerous pollutants from the automotive industry including Ford Motor Company, chrome plating shops, and parts suppliers. In the late 1960s, Wayne County proposed a regional wastewater treatment for the Huron River watershed called the "SuperSewer," which included wastewater from western Wayne County, eastern Washtenaw County, and southern Oakland County. None of the governments involved really favored this idea because of unclear cost determination to the city and township for their portions.

By 1972 Washtenaw County officials feared that the project to stop the pollution of the Huron River would never be built. Washtenaw County proposed building a new Ypsilanti regional wastewater treatment plant (WWTP) as required. Receiving 75% federal funding of the project was feasible only by combining the water and sewer departments of both the city and township. They had to attain economic benefits by eliminating duplication of staff, and economies of scale would be achieved. YCUA was formed in 1974.

The fact that the city is almost completely surrounded by the township made the combination of the two systems an obvious economic advantage. Former Ypsilanti Mayor George Goodman (1972–82) recently commented about the formation of YCUA. He mentioned the historically significant cooperative formation between the city and the township, both of whom had to lay aside past differences to accomplish the formation of a utility authority. This provided the treatment volume and funds necessary to obtain the federal grants. The wastewater plant opened in 1982 with a capacity of 28.9 million gallons per day (MGD).



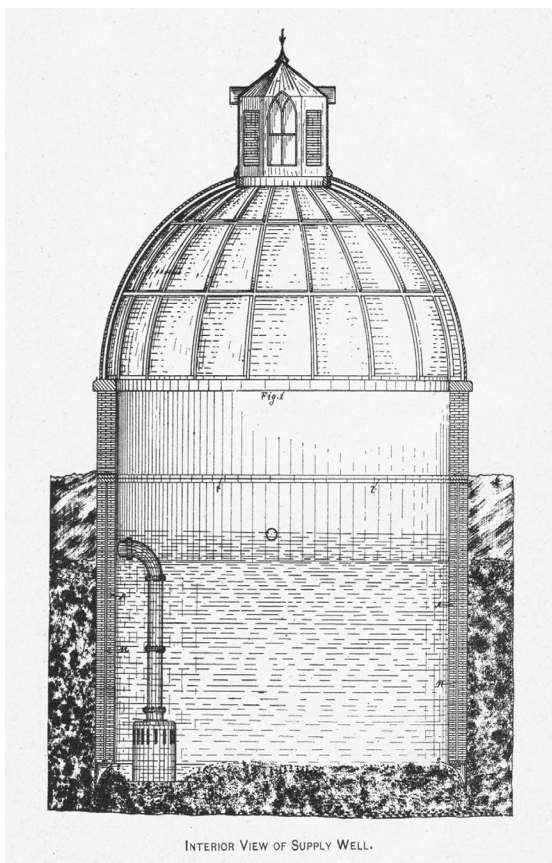
EXTERIOR OF WELL.

Exterior of Ypsilanti Catherine Street Deep Water Well

Initially, the average daily wastewater flow to the WWTP was approximately 13 MGD. In 1988 YCUA entered into an agreement with the Western Township Utilities Authority (WTUA) to receive up to 8.7 MGD and the rights to expand the WWTP in the future. YCUA purchased the rights to use a patented biological nutrient removal process at the WWTP. The biological nutrient removal process, entitled the Anoxic/Oxic (A/O) process, was installed in 1993.

In the expanded WWTP, all passes are operating under A/O. The A/O process removes phosphorus from the wastewater without chemical addition. Aluminum Sulfate (Alum) is stored onsite as a back-up to A/O Process for phosphorus removal. The A/O process

reduces both the purchasing of Alum chemical and sludge production at the WWTP facility. In 2000 WTUA exercised that right, and the WWTP underwent an expansion and improvement project that increased the capacity to 45.9 MGD. Primary filtration is through solids removal. In addition, some highlights of the project were the ultraviolet disinfection facility that replaced chlorination for disinfecting the wastewater, and the original multiple hearth incinerator was replaced with a more efficient fluidized bed incinerator. Also, additional sand filters clean the effluent to a higher degree than required. In 2009 an engineering study was conducted that evaluated the capacity of each of the major treatment processes. The Michigan Department of Environmental Quality (MDEQ) concurred with the methodology used in the engineering study and approved of the YCUA WWTP being rated at 51.2 MGD annual average design (daily) flow. For the fiscal year 2010–11, the average daily flow of wastewater to the YCUA WWTP was 22.3 MGD.



Interior of Ypsilanti Catherine Street Deep Water Well

YCUA Today

Today, YCUA provides drinking water to approximately 120,000 people and wastewater services to approximately 328,000 people. The average daily flow of wastewater to the YCUA WWTP is approximately 30.3 MGD.

YCUA provides water and wastewater services to the City of Ypsilanti, Charter Township of Ypsilanti, Pittsfield Township, Augusta Township, Sumpter Township, and Superior Township. YCUA also contracts with the WTUA to provide wastewater treatment services for the Townships of Canton, Northville, Sumpter Township, and Plymouth.

Annually, YCUA processes more than eight billion gallons of sewage at the wastewater treatment plant (WWTP) located at McGregor and State Streets near Willow Run Airport. YCUA delivers five billion gallons of water each year. In the City of Ypsilanti and Ypsilanti Township, YCUA delivers services directly to approximately 25,000 homes and businesses. In the other communities, YCUA contracts to provide wholesale water and/or wastewater services.

YCUA's annual operating budget in 2021–22 is approximately \$45 million. Upcoming capital improvements to facilities are planned to cost approximately \$18 million. Delivering water to their customers and collecting and treating the wastewater generated are the primary functions of the authority. Assuring the continued viability of their



Ypsilanti Wastewater Treatment Plant on Ford Lake, c. 1962

existing infrastructure and planning for the future water and wastewater needs of these communities is a vital function.

Growth within WTUA's service area resulted in a request to expand the WWTP to treat the additional wastewater generated in their communities. Construction on the WWTP expansion and improvements project, which added 17 MGD capacity to the facility, began in 2002 and was completed in 2006. Following completion of the expansion project, the WWTP is now rated to treat 51.2 million gallons of wastewater per day. Average water use is 11 MGD. In the summer, use may exceed 21 million gallons in a single day.

Many water and sewer mains within Ypsilanti and Ypsilanti Township are identified as needing replacement, either because of age or inadequate size. These replacements are being scheduled as time and funds permit. Side streets were replaced after a successful vote of the city residents in 2003, followed by the repaving of those streets. Major streets (Huron Street, West Cross Street, Washtenaw Avenue, Hamilton Street, and Michigan Avenue) are getting the aging water mains and sewers replaced in 2022 and 2023. This will be followed by the State of Michigan repaving most of these, which are part of the State trunk line, M-17. Some pipes are as much as 120 years old and can fail whenever frost and winter conditions prevail.

The Ypsilanti Stone Water Tower

Ypsilanti's Stone Water Tower celebrates its 133th birthday this year. The tower was constructed in 1890 and has been in continuous service since that time. It stands 147 feet tall at the intersection of Cross and Summit streets, the highest point of elevation in the city. Its reservoir contains a steel tank with a 250,000-gallon capacity. The main purpose for the reservoir was to store a supply of water to feed cast iron mains constructed in 1885 and to generate electricity for city streetlights via the falling water. The elevation also provided sufficient gravity pressure to furnish water for fire emergencies.

The Queen Anne-style tower was built as part of an extensive water works project and was designed by construction engineer William R. Coats, who considered purpose as well as overall appearance. Resting on a foundation of concrete mortar six inches deep, the substructure walls made of Joliet stone are 40 inches thick at the base and 24 inches thick at the top. Constructed on top of the walls were ten-inch steel I-beams spaced two feet apart and crossing the walls at right angles. The steel reservoir tank rests on the beams and walls of the substructure. Finally, there is a cupola with glazed windows.

The tower was constructed with local day labor at a cost of \$21,368. Former Ypsilanti Mayor George Goodman's grandfather, Lewis Goodman, was one of the laborers who built the water tower. The workers constructed three stone crosses, one over the outside west door and two others inside the tower, to protect them from injury. In fact, there were no fatal accidents during construction.

To maintain the solidity and beauty of the tower, YCUA had the structure renovated in 1976 at the cost of \$114,694. This involved re-shingling the roof, replacing beams and barriers, repainting, and other general repairs. In 1987 YCUA reconstructed the entry doors. With each repair and renovation, YCUA has always attempted to maintain the original appearance of the tower. YCUA marked the historical water tower's 130th birthday by giving it a thorough updating while once again retaining its original design. Work on the steel tank finished in 2001, including spot-welding to repair a small leak and other compromised locations on the tank, painting the exterior bottom, re-coating the entire interior surface, and replacing the interior ladder.

A Note on Sources

YCUA records were the source of information for this writing. All images are the property of YCUA.

About the Author

Mike Bodary was first appointed to the YCUA Board of Commissioners in 2012. He was elevated to chair in 2018 and continues to serve in that capacity.

Saving Parkview Apartments

BY PAUL SCHREIBER

Preserving Low-Income Housing

On a lovely sunny spring morning in April 2011, Congressman John Dingell, developer Ben Etheridge, executive director of the Ypsilanti Housing Commission Walter Norris, Washtenaw County commissioners, Ypsilanti politicians, and grateful tenants gathered at the now renamed low-income housing complex, Hamilton Crossing, to celebrate the completion of Phase 2 renovations. It had been a long ordeal.

* * *

I remember being present at a meeting, on November 13, 2003. Worried Parkview Apartments tenants were waiting to hear from representatives of the Federal Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). The residents wanted assurances that they could stay in their homes. Those in attendance had been paying their water bills, but the Ypsilanti Community Utilities Authority (YCUA) had not received approximately \$400,000 from tenants who had failed to pay their bills and moved out. Since there was no way to shut the water off to specific apartment units, YCUA was threatening to cut the water to the entire complex.

Parkview Apartments consists of nineteen buildings that include 144 units of low-income apartments. It was built in the 1970s with financial assistance from HUD. Although HUD did not own Parkview, it had a financial and controlling stake in the property and could force a change in management. Since its construction, Parkview had become dilapidated, accumulating hundreds of housing code violations from the city, in addition to the delinquent \$400,000 water bill.

I attended the November 13 meeting because as a member of the Ypsilanti Housing Commission (YHC) I was determined to preserve quality low-income housing in the city. I had listened to residents complain about roof leaks and flooding in their units,

and they told us that basic repairs were not getting done. But they were also worrying about their water being shut off and a possible change in the ownership of Parkview. The delinquent water bill brought Parkview to the attention of the Washtenaw County Treasurer, and she was beginning foreclosure proceedings. HUD officials at the meeting assured the tenants that they would be taken care of. But the tenants were not convinced.

The First Parkview Auction

In December 2003, HUD assumed the mortgage and paid the \$400,000 water bill. But HUD also wanted to transfer Parkview to another owner, so they sent first-right-of-refusal letters to the City of Ypsilanti and the YHC. HUD listed five affordable housing requirements. If these affordability requirements were met, HUD would then transfer the property for \$100 without a public auction. At the time, HUD was allowed to sell a property for a price below market value. This detail became particularly important later.

The city and the YHC both submitted applications but with different goals in mind. YHC executive director Walter Norris urged board of directors to pursue acquisition of Parkview to rehabilitate and preserve the low-income housing stock in Ypsilanti. Norris asked developer Ben Etheridge of Chesapeake Community Advisors to prepare a proposal that met all five of HUD's affordability requirements and that would keep Parkview as quality affordable housing for low-income families. The city proposal met only three of the HUD affordability requirements. Their proposal aimed to renovate Parkview as market-rate housing, eliminating 144 units of low-income housing and forcing the Parkview residents to find housing elsewhere.

In 2004, HUD was preparing for the foreclosure and transfer of Parkview, but the current Parkview owners were also trying to maintain the status quo. Parkview tenants felt like they were in limbo, with deteriorating living conditions and an uncertain future. Parkview Tenants' Association co-chair, Barbara Patterson, was quoted in the *Ann Arbor News*, saying, "We don't want the [owners] because they don't do what they are supposed to. We're very concerned not knowing what is going to happen."

By late 2004, HUD had selected the YHC proposal to acquire Parkview because their proposal met all five of HUD's low-income housing stipulations. The city was not happy that their proposal was rejected, and they enlisted Congressman John Dingell to support the city's market-rate proposal and persuade HUD to reconsider.

HUD did reconsider, and in the early spring of 2005 they selected the YHC low-income housing proposal for the second time, with an auction date in May. The city was still very unhappy and asked the commission to withdraw its proposal. When the board refused, the Ypsilanti City Council passed resolutions requiring the YHC to obtain permission from the city for the acquisition of any property. Clearly, Parkview Apartments was the target of the resolution. Seeing that the city and the commission were remaining far apart, HUD set a deadline for Ypsilanti and the YHC to reach an agree-

ment before the May 2005 auction. If no agreement was reached, then Parkview would go to the highest bidder.

Discussions between the YHC and the city were heated, and proposed agreements flew back and forth. The city set forth requirements that made it impossible for the commission to finance Parkview renovations. This was a deal breaker for the YHC or for any low-income housing development. The city was making an impossible demand. The HUD deadline came and went with no agreement between the city and the YHC. HUD auctioned Parkview Apartments on May 26, 2005, to Emmanuel Ku, the highest of ten bidders.

Emmanuel Ku was a self-described “daredevil landlord.” But Mr. Ku owned low-income HUD properties in other states that had hundreds of code violations. In addition, the Parkview owners had filed an unsuccessful lawsuit to stop the foreclosure in late 2004, and they now filed for bankruptcy, on June 1, 2005, and stalled the foreclosure proceedings. The Parkview case was fought in the courts for the rest of 2005 by Ku’s attorneys, the Parkview owners, and the Parkview Tenants’ Association. The tenants wanted well-managed low-income housing, and they clearly weren’t going to get it with Emmanuel Ku as the owner.

Eventually HUD canceled the sale to Emmanuel Ku because of pressure from the Parkview Tenants’ Association, and HUD became Mortgagee-in-Possession of Parkview in May 2006. This meant that HUD assumed financial and management responsibilities, including rent collection, repairs, security, and property expenses. The management of Parkview was now the total responsibility of HUD.

Enter John Dingell

During this time, HUD made repairs to the apartments that were still occupied and the living conditions for the tenants improved. But Parkview tenants were moving out, and about half of the apartment complex was vacant and boarded up. The threat of another foreclosure sale and the uncertainty of a new owner weighed on the minds of the remaining Parkview residents. They were still in limbo.

In spring 2007, HUD sent notices to Parkview residents that not all would receive tenant rental payment assistance for low-income housing when the property was sold. HUD intended to schedule another foreclosure sale of Parkview to



Ypsilanti mayor Paul Schreiber and Congressman John Dingell, in April 2011, at the dedication of Hamilton Crossing

the highest bidder, on August 8, 2007. Attorney Bob Gillette, representing the Parkview Tenants' Association, objected with court action against HUD. U.S. Representative John Dingell suggested that HUD revive the original sale offer to the Ypsilanti Housing Commission. Unfortunately, HUD no longer had the option of offering Parkview for \$100, because of the Deficit Reduction Act passed by Congress in 2005. An auction to the highest bidder was now HUD's only option.

Readers may be wondering why John Dingell was supporting the Ypsilanti Housing Commission in 2007, when he had supported city council's 2004 market-rate proposal. In 2004, I had met John Dingell at a fundraiser for the Ypsilanti Freight House and asked him why he was supporting the city's proposal instead of the YHC proposal. I can still hear him say: "Paul, I don't necessarily disagree with what you are trying to do. But I am going to do what the local elected officials want me to do." In 2004, the City of Ypsilanti wanted John Dingell to convince HUD to make Parkview market-rate housing.

In 2006, I ran for mayor of Ypsilanti on a platform of fiscal responsibility, countywide cooperation on public transportation, and improved low-income housing alternatives. I won the August 2006 primary, assuring that I would be the next mayor. I recall the day after the primary election when John Dingell called my cell phone to congratulate me, saying, "Paul, I look forward to working with you to renovate Parkview and make it a success." John Dingell had now joined me on the low-income housing team, along with the Ypsilanti Housing Commission.

HUD eventually canceled another Parkview auction planned for August 8, 2007, after Bob Gillette and the Parkview Tenants' Association filed another lawsuit claiming that the sale conditions and lack of tenant rental payment assistance were unacceptable.

During 2008, HUD continued to manage Parkview and board up units as they were vacated. HUD also sent multiple notices to the residents again, with no improvement on tenant rental payment assistance.

Meanwhile, John Dingell and his staff were hard at work on behalf of the city and the YHC. Working with his congressional colleagues, Congressman Dingell successfully inserted earmark language into the Foreclosure Prevention Act of 2008 that specifically allowed HUD to transfer Parkview Apartments to the Ypsilanti Housing Commission for a below-market price. This was a pivotal piece of legislation. HUD again delayed the foreclosure sale of Parkview while the legislation was pending. But even after the legislation was signed, HUD insisted that they did not have the authority to provide financing and transfer Parkview to the YHC.

Parkview Tenants Prevail

On September 18, 2008, Bob Gillette and the Parkview Tenants' Association again sued HUD for failing to maintain Parkview's physical condition, failing to keep it at full occupancy, refusing to provide rental payment assistance to all Parkview residents, and



Hamilton Crossing: the finished product

planning to dispose of Parkview without residents being given notice or an opportunity to be heard. About thirty-five families remained in Parkview's apartments, and the city was about to lose 144 units of low-income housing.

On September 8, 2009, U.S. District Judge Victoria Roberts agreed with the Parkview tenants and directed HUD to allow the sale of Parkview Apartments for a below-market price to the Ypsilanti Housing Commission, with tenant rental payment assistance and renovation financing.

I still remember meeting with HUD lawyer Frank Zebot later that fall in Detroit, where he calmly laid out the terms of sale. It was everything that the YHC had requested in the original 2004 proposal: a \$100 sale price, tenant rental payment assistance, and partial renovation financing. I was nervous, even overwhelmed; the YHC and the Ypsilanti community were being given a huge opportunity to renovate a linchpin of affordable housing in the city. It was a serious responsibility, and it had to be done right.

Fortunately, the Parkview developer, Ben Etheridge of Chesapeake Community Advisors, was extremely capable. Ben secured low-income housing tax-credit bank loans to augment the HUD financing. The Parkview tenants were now protected. Soon, Parkview was attractively renovated, and the complex was renamed Hamilton Crossing.

With the renovation of Parkview, the YHC was now able to transform public housing throughout the city. Substandard 1940s public housing in Ypsilanti was replaced by

attractive townhouses, and Paradise Manor, on West Michigan Avenue, was renovated and renamed Sauk Trail Pointe.

Low-income housing in Ypsilanti was changed for the better through the valiant efforts of Walter Norris and the Ypsilanti Housing Commission, Bob Gillette and the YHC tenants, Ypsilanti City Council, the late Congressman John Dingell, and the late Ben Etheridge of Chesapeake Community Advisors. All of us who care about the issue of affordable housing for low-income people should be thankful.

A Note on Sources

The information in this essay came from *Ann Arbor News* articles, my own notes and personal recollections, and the various court orders involving the Parkview Tenants' Association. Images were provided by the author.

About the Author

Retired electronics engineer Paul Schreiber was mayor of Ypsilanti from 2006 to 2014. Prior to serving as mayor, Paul was a member of the Ypsilanti Housing Commission for ten years. He is currently president of the Ypsilanti Heritage Foundation.

Water Street

A Grand Attempt to Preserve City Solvency

BY CHERYL FARMER WITH ED KORYZNO

A Vision for the Future

In 1996, the Ypsilanti City Council began implementing annual visioning sessions, as suggested by former council member Al Robinson and encouraged by Ed Koryzno, our preferred city manager candidate. Ed told us during his interview process, “I wouldn’t want to work for a council that doesn’t do visioning. If you don’t know what you want, how will I know when I’m meeting your goals?”

Over time, council, together with department heads, assembled lists of things we loved about our city and wanted to preserve, as well as conditions we thought were holding us back. These sessions also built trust. First, we tackled easy issues everyone agreed upon, like improving the perception of and, in some neighborhoods, the reality of danger. We reorganized the police department, tackled blight through improved ordinance enforcement, and addressed bad landlords through tightened building inspections (Ypsilanti has twice as many rental units as the average college town).

With these successes under our belts, and through continued visioning and trust-building, we were able to address bigger problems like bonding to repave all the neighborhood streets. We also increased water rates to replace all the old and rupturing water mains, remove any lead water lines, and replace collapsing Orangeburg tile sewer lines.

In Need of Revenue

In 1999, the Ypsilanti City Council learned we were in a downward spiral, heading toward bankruptcy. The only thing we could control that could get us out of this serious problem would be a new tax-paying development. Ypsilanti is an older mostly built-out community, and this problem was not one that could be easily solved. We tackled it from every angle: identifying every unbuilt parcel that might be available for development; identifying empty lots and homes in foreclosure suitable for building or rehab by Habi-



Looking southeast along Michigan Avenue, 2010

tat for Humanity; marketing city-owned buildable lots; encouraging the high school building program to construct homes on the closed Fletcher School playground property adjacent to an existing neighborhood; inviting Cleary College to build their new campus behind their existing campus on Washtenaw at Hewitt and financing it by selling their Washtenaw frontage for taxable commercial use. (Cleary did sell their Washtenaw frontage to Walgreens and AutoZone, but they sold the balance of their property to EMU and moved to a former Ann Arbor hotel at Plymouth Road and US-23).

The Ypsilanti Planning Department then identified the area south of East Michigan Avenue between Water Street (along the Michigan Avenue bridge) and Park Street as an undervalued area with great potential for development. At the time, this was a troubled area. Largely populated with vacant and dilapidated buildings, the police were frequently called there to address prostitution, drugs, and fights. Often the fire department was called to put out fires on the property. Trash was anonymously dumped there, and the park along the river was largely unused due to the perception and the reality of danger. The entire thirty-two acres generated only about \$23,000 annually in taxes.

However, this parcel is bordered on two-and-a-half sides by the Huron River, with views of the bluff along South Huron Street as it descends southeastward to Waterworks Park. Water Street, as the property came to be known, had the potential to become an asset: a new neighborhood of affordable homes along a linear park. The Michigan Avenue frontage would be appropriate for mixed use: commercial on the ground level, with apartments or condos above. Furthermore, if all the small parcels within this area could be assembled, the whole would be large enough to attract a major developer.

Assembling and building out this new neighborhood would generate needed property taxes and bring new residents within walking distance of our downtown restaurants and businesses. It would also clean up blight and reduce crime and fires. Development would offer housing and retail space of a type and size not available in the city's existing stock. The linear park would ultimately link to the county-wide Border-to-Border (B2B) Trail then being created, a trail that had been inspired by the more than 100-year-old plan created for Ypsilanti by famed American landscape architect Frederick Law Olmsted for a park along the Huron River from edge to edge within the city.

This was our collective vision for Water Street. We tasked our amazing Planning Department director Jennifer Goulet and her staff with making it a reality. But it was complicated! The city would purchase and assemble the properties, borrowing the money for three to five years, then repaying the loan with money from both the sale of the property to a developer plus the new property taxes generated as the development was built.

Pursuing the Plan

Some purchases were easy, some were not. Public hearings were held to confirm the public purpose of this project in the event it became necessary to use eminent domain, but it did not. Property lines did not always match up, leaving a few small parcels of land with no obvious owner, hindering our ability to obtain clear title.

Once assembled, the blight was cleared. Havens for criminal activity were eliminated



Southwest Corner of East Michigan and River Street in 2010. The abandoned building was once Doran Chevrolet dealership

and police officers freed up to keep our neighborhoods safe. Contamination was found where it had been expected: dry cleaning fluid that had been dumped behind an old dry cleaning business, oil from a former gas station, ink from the Ypsilanti Press building, and more. A surprise was the finding of significant levels of natural arsenic. Because of the contamination, we successfully applied to become a brownfield, a designation that would entitle a developer to state tax credits.

We learned from residents that the historic brick building at the northwest corner of the Water Street property, then the site of Walters Heating and Cooling, was near the hundred-year flood plain and we reluctantly had it demolished. The plan then was to bring twenty feet of fill to the low areas and level the entire parcel. This would also bury any contamination.

Filling the west side of Water Street meant that we would need to lower an area downstream at the site of the old city water plant so future flood waters would have a place to go. The Michigan Department of Natural Resources approved this idea. We noted that old concrete from the demolished water plant that had been dumped inappropriately along the edge of the Huron River in Waterworks Park could be removed simultaneously.

Our first developer was David Stollman. One of his partners did a walk-about with interested members of the community, becoming very enthusiastic about Depot Town and downtown as “authentic” and “walkable.” Their proximity to the Water Street parcel increased its desirability as a place in which to develop a new neighborhood.

Workshops were held to gather public input on street layouts and names, with the community wanting the new neighborhood seamlessly connected to existing neighborhoods. A beautiful presentation book was produced with drawings of the design proposals. Some decried the commercial portion along East Michigan Avenue as too dense but, overall, the community was ready to proceed.

Delays and Frustration

Then nothing happened and months went by. Ultimately, we learned that this firm had previously only developed new subdivisions on former farm land. The partner, who was the enthusiastic lead on our project and committed to urban development, had split with Stollman, and the company was not comfortable building on a brownfield. Every month of delay was costing us interest on our loan. We parted ways and began the search for another developer.

In 2006, local realtor Ed Surovell put me in touch with local developer Joe O’Neal, who told me he knew a larger company, Freed, that was already in Michigan with projects in different stages of development in Ann Arbor, Royal Oak, and Plymouth. He arranged a meeting for me, and I learned they were interested in adding Water Street! A preliminary concept was developed by Ed Connell and presented to the community.

We liked it! Then, in 2007, the bottom was beginning to fall out of the real estate market. Freed dropped all of their Michigan projects and moved to Arizona.

A subsequent Ypsilanti City Council, following the vision, turned down a Burger King. The county proposed building a Recreation Center on Water Street, which would have been lovely but would have completely defeated the purpose of the vision, which was to add significant property to the tax rolls to assure long-term city solvency. Another council, feeling desperate to see something get started, approved a Dollar Store. This business certainly sends mixed messages about the value of the remainder of the Water Street parcel.

Then came a proposal for affordable housing. Key arguments against this proposal included the County Master Plan for Ypsilanti, which acknowledged a disproportionate number of rentals and the need to pursue more home ownership options to stabilize neighborhoods. The proposal also contradicted the core value of diversity in the new City Master Plan as the proposal did not add to the diversity of our housing stock nor to our economic diversity. Another core value was sustainability, meaning that every decision should foster the future, but affordable developers demanded payments in lieu of taxes, which Ypsilanti could not afford. Fortunately, this proposal failed to materialize.

As the years passed and Water Street remained basically undeveloped, interest payments on the debt became a burden to our already impoverished city budget. So,



Looking southeast along Michigan Avenue, 2022

when the millage to repave the streets expired, another council wisely placed a millage on the ballot to pay for the Water Street debt, and it passed.

Then came a well-funded Chinese developer wanting to build housing for Chinese students and other Chinese nationals under a federal program that exchanged development dollars for U.S. citizenship. Ypsilantians were quite interested in the development, but they were determined that anyone should be allowed to buy and live there, not just people of Chinese origin. That plan ultimately blew up when Mayor Amanda Edmonds and Mayor Pro-tem Nicole Brown visited China to review the kinds of developments this company had done previously. Upon their return, some council members decried the method of payment for their trips as unethical and inappropriate. By the time the dust settled that developer had also vanished.

In 2023, Water Street remains undeveloped.

A Note on Sources

All photographs are from the Ypsilanti Historical Society Archives.

About the Author

Cheryl Farmer, MD, retired from her private practice in general internal medicine in 2013. During her more than thirty-year career, Dr. Farmer was honored to be named, in 2002, Woman Physician of the Year by the Michigan State Medical Society. In 2010, she was elected president of the Washtenaw County Medical Society. In 1993, Dr. Farmer was elected to the Ypsilanti Charter Commission, which wrote ethics into a brand-new charter. In spring of 1995, she became the first woman mayor of Ypsilanti to win an at-large election; she served three terms and stepped down exhausted in the fall of 2006.

The Story Behind the Closing of Michigan Avenue Books and News

BY EDWARD B. KORYZNO, JR.

The Business in Question

The building located at 208 West Michigan Avenue was the location of many retail businesses during the twentieth century. A furniture store operated there for most of the century until it was replaced for a brief period by a pet store and then a bookstore. But no business had been more controversial than Michigan Avenue Books and News, an adult bookstore that opened in 1991. Many downtown business owners found the store's material offensive and not conducive to creating a family environment for shopping. However, it was not possible to force the store to close because of the freedom of speech clause contained in the U.S. Constitution.

Beginning in 1999, a series of events took place which would seal the bookstore's fate and also become the most significant and far-reaching undercover operation in the history of the Ypsilanti Police Department.

Mayor Dr. Cheryl Farmer had expressed concern about the health conditions inside Michigan Avenue Books and News. The AIDS epidemic had peaked, but the disease was still prevalent. Rumors of lewd behavior, sexual encounters, and several "cruising for sex" internet sites were associated with the bookstore.

Soliciting a Solution

The Ypsilanti Police Department (YPD) began an investigation of the store's activities under the direction of Police Chief George Basar. Four YPD detectives and two undercover officers from police departments in Wayne County composed the core group who gathered information during the eight-month investigation. The investigation included studying traffic patterns at the stores and then moving inside by posing as customers and employees.

Chief Basar wanted to have a dedicated prosecutor on the case, but Washtenaw

County Prosecutor Brian Mackey rejected the city's request. Undeterred, Chief Basar asked City Attorney John Barr for assistance, and Barr designated Assistant City Attorney Jack Gilbreath as the city's prosecutor on this case.

Because the First Amendment prevented closing the store, another applicable law had to be found. Jack Gilbreath knew one possible option was having the building forfeited under a Racketeer Influenced and Corrupt Organizations Act (RICO) action in federal court.

Gilbreath knew the attorney in charge of the U.S. Attorney's Office for the Eastern District of Michigan, as he had attended high school with him. He contacted the attorney with a twofold purpose. Gilbreath was hoping to discover a federal predicate act the bookstore owner may have violated and to determine whether the U.S. attorney was interested in pursuing the case. Unfortunately, he was unsuccessful on both counts.

Jack Gilbreath was also aware of a state public nuisance statute that could possibly close the business. The city could file an injunction, claiming the property was operating as a "bawdy house," as would-be customers were paying for sex. If successful, perhaps the business would be closed for a year, but that was an unsatisfactory outcome to the city.

Legal Briefs

It appeared that the City of Ypsilanti was running out of legal options. Then Ypsilanti Police Detective Amy Walker contacted Gilbreath with important information. She told him that she had researched the owner of the bookstore, James Olsafsky, and her research revealed that he owned a number of bookstores all over the state of Michigan. All of them were structured in such a way that Olsafsky owned the properties but not the businesses operating on the premises. This information was essential to further the city's case against the bookstore.

Gilbreath was also aware of an adult entertainment venue which had recently been raided by the Wayne County sheriff's department. He contacted the Wayne County Prosecutor and inquired about the adult entertainment venue closing. He was told that Larry Roberts, an appellate attorney, was the lead attorney on the case. Roberts had busted a movie theatre named the Melody Fine Arts Theatre.

Based upon this information, Basar, Walker, and Gilbreath met with Roberts. They discovered that Roberts had used a Michigan law which was comparable to RICO to close the theatre. This was the Continuing Criminal Enterprise Act, which requires an enterprise and more than one violation of the predicate acts.

Roberts had used the Continuing Criminal Enterprise Act in combination with operating a "bawdy house" to prosecute and close the theatre. Customers who went into the theatre bought a ticket to watch the movie, but then engaged in sex acts. The owner of the theatre was selling tickets at the door, so he could not hide behind "ignorance"; instead, he had a full view of what was going on. The theatre operation was a continuing

criminal enterprise, and the predicate acts that were violated were “operating a house of ill repute” and “lewdness.”

The City of Ypsilanti had now discovered a potential statute to pursue closure of the bookstore, but there was a problem: Olsafsky had no connection to the business operating on his property. Unfortunately, another individual owned that business, and Olsafsky was insulated from the criminal enterprise allegations.

This recent discovery meant that the city had to find someone who could visit the bookstore. Chief Basar contacted the Wayne County Sheriff for assistance, and they provided an officer. The officer discovered that as soon as he walked in the door of the bookstore, money was exchanged for tokens. He then proceeded downstairs where the booths were located. The booths played videos in exchange for tokens, and customers could engage in sexual activity as long as they kept putting tokens in the booth.



208 West Michigan Avenue (date uncertain)

Ypsilanti could not prosecute Olsafsky unless he was connected to the tokens. The city was aware of other jurisdictions in which were located bookstores owned by Olsafsky. Basar had undercover officers in Taylor, Detroit, Lansing, Grand Rapids, and Traverse City plant marked bills in the bookstores. The city now had a money trail and a method of connecting the continuing criminal enterprise between the store owner and the booths.

But the city could not legally prosecute using the Continuing Criminal Enterprise Act. Under state law, such a case may only be brought by the county prosecutor. So Gilbreath reached out to Washtenaw County Prosecutor Brian Mackie about the possibility of bringing a continuing criminal enterprise case against Michigan Avenue Books and News. Mackie responded favorably to Gilbreath's request and assigned two assistant prosecuting attorneys to work with him. The case was a risky venture because the city's insinuation that the bookstore was a “house of ill repute” where “indecent exposure” occurred did not fit the stereotype of bookstores.

Undercover Operations

Assistant City Attorney Jack Gilbreath and Washtenaw County Assistant Prosecutor Lenore Ferber prepared a search warrant for 208 West Michigan Avenue based upon the affidavits signed by the undercover officers working at the various stores. Prosecutors authorized the search warrants based on nearly thirty hours of surveillance footage captured by undercover investigators from the YPD, Michigan State Police, and other departments in Wayne County.

Search warrants were prepared for all of the other locations, in addition to Ypsilanti. Chief Basar met with the individual police departments the day before the search warrants were to be executed. This was to ensure that all of the search warrants would be coordinated and executed simultaneously, so no store employee would be tipped off by another employee at a different location. The YPD would lead and implement a simultaneous statewide police raid at multiple locations.

On March 22, 2000, the culmination of eight months of undercover police work came to fruition. Multiple raids occurred at all bookstores owned by James Olsafsky, including Michigan Avenue Books and News. Officers from seven counties across the state participated, and twenty-four search warrants were served in Detroit, Jackson, Flint, Grand Rapids, Westland, Hazel Park, and Waterford. Stores were linked by ownership and had the same distributor in Westland, according to corporate documents and store employees. Corporate documents also linked the company to other adult-oriented businesses in Ohio, according to Ypsilanti Police Detective Sergeant Craig Annas.

Police confiscated \$13,000 in cash from all the stores and froze more than \$120,000 of Olsafsky's assets, according to court records. Much of the cash which was found on a desk in Olsafsky's office contained the marked bills the police had planted. The importance of this find was that Olsafsky could not deny knowledge of what was taking place in the bookstores.

After the search warrants were executed, Ypsilanti building inspectors closed both Michigan Avenue Books and News and the Magazine Rack for being unfit for occupancy and for changing their authorized use without proper approval by the city. The stores remained closed until the problems were fixed. According to court documents, Chelsea resident Andrew Fields owned the Magazine Rack, 515 West Cross Street. However, he leased the area containing the booths to another company that Olsafsky operated. Washtenaw County Circuit Court Judge Donald Shelton ruled that the bookstores could remain open, but the area containing the booths had to be closed to the public.

The city's attorneys always believed they had a strong case against the bookstore owner. This was confirmed on October 12, 2000, when the president of the Michigan Avenue Books and News, Inc., and JJO Enterprises, Inc., pleaded no contest before Judge Shelton on two counts of money laundering, racketeering, and lewdness occurring between January 1, 1999, and March 22, 2000.

The owners agreed to a list of stipulations: to deed the 208 West Michigan Avenue property to the city; not to establish another adult bookstore within ten miles of downtown Ypsilanti; to phase out booths in thirteen other bookstores the company operated in Flint, Jackson, Taylor, and Grand Rapids by February 2, 2002; to pay \$225,000 to the IRS for unpaid taxes or face a \$50,000 fine for each violation; to pay \$100,000 to the City of Ypsilanti for the cost of the investigation; and to pay \$3,000 in court costs.

A Lasting Resolution

What began as a public health concern at Michigan Avenue Books and News evolved into a series of events that no city resident could have imagined. Besides closing Michigan Avenue Books and News, multiple affiliated adult bookstores were also closed in a statewide effort led by the YPD. An indirect benefit of this investigation was to use the same process to close multiple drug houses, nuisance businesses, and the city's largest slum landlord. These successes occurred because of interdepartmental cooperation and dedicated city employees. The process was slow, methodical, and meticulous.

Today, the business climate of downtown Ypsilanti has vastly improved over what existed in March 2000. It would be presumptuous to base the subsequent advancement solely upon the closing of the adult bookstore. However, it would be hard to imagine the successful reemergence of downtown without the absence of Michigan Avenue Books and News.

A Note on Sources

This information was gathered from personal recollections and newspapers. The author would like to thank former Ypsilanti Police Chief George Basar, former Ypsilanti Assistant City Attorney Jack Gilbreath, and former Ypsilanti Fire Chief/Fire Marshall Jon Ichesco for their assistance. The photograph is from the Ypsilanti Historical Society Archives.

About the Author

Edward B. Koryzno, Jr., was the Ypsilanti City Manager from 1996 to 2012. He was president of the Michigan Local Government Management Association in 2008, and he received the Michigan Municipal Executives Association Distinguished Service Award in 2019.

The Fight for Equality in Ypsilanti

LISA MILLS WALTERS

Author's Note

When I was elected to represent Ward 2 on the Ypsilanti City Council in April of 1995, I had no idea that I would be a part of what many have since called the most important political event in the city of the past fifty years, an event that both unified and divided Ypsilanti and ignited a battle that lasted for eighteen months. My fellow councilmembers throughout this process included Dr. Cheryl Farmer, mayor; Trudy Swanson and Ronnie Peterson, Ward 1 representatives; John Gawlas, Ward 2; and mayor pro tem Terry McDonald and Pam Cuthbert, Ward 3. The story of the Anti-Discrimination Ordinance, including events leading up to it and its aftermath, could easily fill a book. The following are my personal recollections and impressions of that time.

Genesis of the Ordinance

Its beginnings were inauspicious. On February 10, 1997, an EMU student group, Tri-Pride, ordered raffle tickets from Hansen's Standard Printing in Depot Town. The order was initially accepted but later rejected, when the owners of the printing company said they had realized that the group placing the order identified as LGBT and that the order contained "objectionable moral content." A few days later, Tri-Pride met with the owners, Carol and Loren Hansen, to try to work things out.

When that failed, Tri-Pride's attorney met with Mayor Cheryl Farmer and, on her recommendation, filed a complaint with the recently formed Human Relations Commission (HRC). After a series of meetings and hearings, in March the HRC voted five to four to not recommend that the city council draft an ordinance and to not take further action against the printing company. But we council members knew that something needed to be done.

Meanwhile, a group of residents calling themselves Citizens for Community (C4C), representing much of the LGBT population of Ypsilanti, was seeking support from

other groups and allies. They requested swift city council action to create a non-discrimination ordinance that specifically protected the citizens of the City of Ypsilanti from discrimination on the basis of race, sex, marital status, familial status, age, disability, national origin, source of income, and sexual orientation.

In July 1997, the council passed a resolution authorizing formation of a subcommittee that would draft the specific language of this ordinance. At the time, East Lansing and Ann Arbor had similar ordinances, as did other cities across the country, so the subcommittee had samples to look at to determine the best fit for Ypsilanti. The ordinance that turned out to be the best fit for Ypsilanti was the one in place in Iowa City, Iowa. The subcommittee worked with city attorneys, suggesting specific language, knowing that the ordinance would be challenged immediately.

City Council's Involvement

I don't think any of us on council understood how intense the reaction to this issue would be, especially on the part of the opposition. Suddenly, council meetings were so well-attended that they had to be moved from city hall to increasingly larger venues: the Riverside Arts Center theater, the Ypsilanti High School auditorium, and the Hoyt Conference Center at EMU. Audience participation became lengthy and heated. People whom we had never known to express an opinion about the city suddenly became very vocal, and many who had never attended a council meeting were suddenly familiar to us, even before we placed the actual ordinance on our agenda.

Our first reading took place in November 1997. We listened to audience members for hours, voted, and unanimously approved the ordinance. At the December 16 meeting, because of threats from audience members at a previous meeting, both uniformed and plainclothes police officers were present. We again approved the ordinance on its second and final reading. A challenge was filed immediately by a group calling themselves Citizens Opposing Special Treatment (COST), and the controversy continued to accelerate.

Public Reaction and Opposition

For me personally, dealing with this ordinance was difficult in many ways and simple in many others. It was painful to hear some of the comments from audience members at council meetings. My best friend of forty-eight years is a gay man, so the hatred and vitriol expressed—to hear our friends and, in some cases, family members called “filth” and “sicker than sick”—was painful, the ignorance and lack of compassion truly disheartening. One neighbor who called me to express opposition to the ordinance said she didn't want to identify herself because her best friend's son was gay. My first thought was that someone whose best friend's son was gay should be more understanding of the issue, my second thought was that she didn't need to identify herself, because I had Caller ID.

While there was only one threat of actual physical violence that I'm aware of, council

members routinely received letters and phone calls telling us that we would cause the end of civilization; we were turning Ypsilanti into Sodom and Gomorrah; and we were going to hell. Every time I got a letter from someone opposed to the ordinance, I replied with a document listing frequently asked questions about the ordinance that included answers explaining my position. Friends and colleagues told me I should ignore these people, but I truly, even if mistakenly, believed there might still be a chance to change some minds.

So, while the fight was a difficult experience, knowing what to do was a simple decision. It was obvious to all of us on council that we needed this ordinance. Sometimes as an elected official, your personal beliefs conflict with your constituents' wishes, and you must work to find a balance. In this case, that wasn't a problem. Many of the residents in my ward supported the ordinance and let me know. I kept a record of phone calls and letters I received, and they ran about ten to one in support of the ordinance. This is especially impressive when you consider that we generally heard from our constituents only when they had a complaint. This was perhaps the only issue for which I received messages of support. I remember the exact words of one woman who called me and said, "I've never called a councilperson before and I don't have time to talk, but I had to tell you you're doing the right thing." Even though we knew we were doing the right thing, it was gratifying to get that positive reinforcement.

One of the complaints from those opposed to the ordinance was that council should listen to the advice of the Human Relations Commission. But that commission was made up of people who were appointed, not elected, and their vote was five to four, which basically meant that one person, who was not chosen by voters, was deciding for everyone in the city. Council was made up of seven individuals, all of whom were chosen by their constituents and all of whom agreed that passing this ordinance was the right thing to do.

Resistance to the ordinance came from both inside and outside the city. As Catholics, mayor pro tem Terry McDonald and I were particularly targeted by the *Credo*, a deeply conservative Ann Arbor-based newspaper. I received many phone calls and had long discussions with one of their writers who always referred to me in her articles as "Catholic Councilmember Walters" and to Terry as "Catholic Mayor Pro Tem McDonald." Presumably, their implication was that as Catholics, we should be more conservative; I believed that as Catholics we should be more compassionate.

Some of the opponents to the ordinance didn't want to acknowledge their personal bias, so they claimed to be opposed for financial reasons. They predicted that everyone and his brother would be filing suit and the city would go broke defending itself. Later, when a news story was done on the first anniversary of the adoption of the ordinance, and it was pointed out that not a single suit had been filed, some of these same opponents claimed that they knew all along that no suits would be filed, proving the ordinance was unnecessary, and that *this* was why they opposed it.

Epilogue

In 2001, members of the 1998 city council were given Courage in Leadership awards by the LGBT and Friends Alumni Chapter of EMU. The award certificates were presented to us by Judy Shepard, the mother of Matthew Shepard, the young man from Wyoming who was brutally beaten and left to die because of his sexual orientation. As the mother of three sons, I understood that Mrs. Shepard had worked infinitely harder and suffered infinitely more than any of us on council, and I was truly humbled to meet her and receive this recognition.

This experience affected councilmembers differently. Pam Cuthbert was subsequently outed as a lesbian, lost her bid for re-election, and later moved away because of the rejection of her lifelong neighbors. Trudy Swanson was re-elected to council but was asked to leave her church. I chose not to run for re-election due to family commitments. Ronnie Peterson continued in his political career and became a state representative.

While this experience was frequently painful and difficult, it was a crucial milestone for our city, and I'm very proud to have been a part of it.

Addendum

On May 5, 1998, the first attempt to repeal the ordinance was rejected by Ypsilanti voters by a large margin, indicating that city council had, indeed, represented their constituents. In 2002, this same group tried to amend the city charter to preclude it from containing any mention of sexual orientation regarding discrimination, stating specifically that their intent was to "prohibit protection for gay, lesbian, or bisexual people." This attempt also failed.

A Note on Sources

In addition to my personal recollections, the information in this article was supplemented by an oral presentation at the Downtown Branch of the Ypsilanti District Library, in May of 2017, commemorating the twentieth anniversary of the ordinance.

About the Author

Lisa Mills Walters moved to Ypsilanti in 1979 to attend graduate school at EMU. In 1980, she married Eric Walters; they raised three sons and lived in Ypsi for thirty-seven years. During that time, Lisa was elected to city council; was a founder and long-time president of the NPNA; served on the boards of the Ypsi Heritage Foundation, the Riverside Arts Center, the Ypsi Community Choir, and the Historical Society Archives; was a member of the City's Recreation Commission and Community Promotions Commission; and served as manager of the Friends of the Library Bookshop. She was employed by EMU from 1987 to 2015, first teaching in the English Department and then as the Graduate School's thesis/dissertation reader. Lisa and Eric retired to Palm

Springs, California, but maintain a summer home on Ypsilanti's Ford Lake.

Part Two:
Education

Integrating the Ypsilanti Public Schools in the Mid-1970s

BY JERRY JENNINGS

Author's Perspective

This essay is about the public schools in the city and township that now comprise the Ypsilanti Community Schools District. It is not intended to be an exhaustive analysis of the educational programs or staff employed by the district. Rather, it is primarily a review and point of view from a former member of the school board who served a single four-year term, from 1972 to 1976.

In the forty-five years since that time there have been many social, economic, and population changes in this geographic region of Michigan that have affected public schools. Changes in school leadership at the local and state levels have also significantly affected the public schools as political interests place greater support on the concept of privatizing public education. This is a discussion of the changes in the district's elementary schools that led to the integration of Black children enrolled in its elementary schools; it focuses specifically on the Perry Elementary School, which is located on the south side of Ypsilanti.

Free and Equal Education

The Ypsilanti school district, in 1972, included ten elementary schools: Erickson, George, Adams, Ardis, Woodruff, Perry, Chapelle, Estabrook, Central, and Fletcher; two middle schools (East and West); and one high school. Virtually all children and youth in the city and township attended those schools. The local St. John's Catholic elementary school had closed in the early 1970s. The charter school concept for Michigan had not yet been developed and private or church-associated schools in Ypsilanti accommodated very few children.

A major national issue through the 1960s and into the 1970s was the racial makeup of our communities and schools. Historically, public school districts throughout the

nation were structured along racial lines, with schools being built to serve exclusively Black student populations in what were isolated Black neighborhoods. Even though it was believed children in a Black neighborhood would receive the same education as white children in a white neighborhood, the reality was that it did not and could not always happen.

Ypsilanti has had a Black population almost from its founding in 1823. The town was a participant in the Underground Railroad, with several stations in the immediate area. However, as the community grew, most Black citizens who came here settled on the south side of the community, primarily south of Michigan Avenue (a.k.a., the Chicago Road or U.S. Highway 12). This avenue was often referred to as the dividing line between Ypsilanti's white and Black communities.

As the community grew, we can assume that school administrators realized the importance of educating Black children and decided to build a school on the south side of town. Thus, Perry Elementary School on Harriet Street was constructed, and it became an all-Black school.

Ypsilanti built two middle schools in the 1950s: East and West. Children completing the first six years of school at Perry, typically now eleven years of age, were divided between the two middle schools. East Middle School was near the Black community, and it had a larger number of Black children enrolled than did West Middle.

The single high school, just north of downtown, had been built to serve all high school students in Ypsilanti. In 1972, a new high school was built on the far west side, at the border of Ypsilanti Township and the City of Ypsilanti. All high school students on the east side of the city and in the township had to be bused to that building.

Until 1957, all Ypsilanti children above sixth grade in the city attended integrated schools. No restrictions by policy or practice existed, saying that a child in Ypsilanti could not attend a given school because of color or race. However, from an operational and management standpoint it was understood that children in the prominently Black Perry Elementary School neighborhood would attend that school from kindergarten through sixth grade. The families that surrounded it considered Perry their neighborhood school. If parents preferred that their child attend any of the other nine elementary schools in the district, transportation would be on them.

On the national level in the 1960s, social and cultural forces were creating a greater awareness of inequities between white and Black populations in our nation. Awareness that children were not receiving the same level and quality of education in communities because of their color or race resulted in the school integration movement. Federal legislation mandated changes in schools to provide "equal" education opportunities for children at all grade levels. School attendance was not to be dictated by a child's color or race.



Perry Child Development Center, 2022

Bringing Change to Perry

To avoid sanctions by the federal government from the Supreme Court's 1954 ruling in *Brown v. Board of Education*, the Ypsilanti school board, in 1975, chose to make changes in their school attendance policies. Because the district had an elementary school in a Black neighborhood that was educating only Black students, when all other buildings were educating primarily white students, discussions now centered on the likelihood of having to transport students from Perry to other schools in the district. The plan was to continue to use the Perry school building because all other elementary buildings in the district were at capacity. The building would continue as an elementary school. Thus, any plan under consideration had nearly equal numbers of Black and white students assigned to every grade level. Of course, it was going to be necessary for white elementary students from neighborhoods other than the Perry neighborhood to be transported by bus to Perry to achieve the needed balance.

The following action was taken, as reported in board of education minutes of January 12, 1976:

The board of education of the school district of Ypsilanti supports the goal of quality education for all students in Ypsilanti Public Schools. As one effort in working toward this goal, the board will seek to align attendance areas for the elementary

schools to promote school environments that represent multi-ethnic and multi-racial compositions of the Ypsilanti community, and to correct population imbalance that exists. To this end the board established and charged the *1975-76 Elementary Enrollment Study Task Force* with providing recommendations for future schools concerning realignment of elementary school attendance areas for the 1976-77 school year, as well as all concomitant issues and policies that task reveals, including racial balance, transportation, future enrollments, and population trends.

This provided the rationale to move ahead with a plan to create fully integrated schools and classrooms throughout the district at all grade levels. Thus, it was recognized that enrollment at the Perry Elementary School needed to be changed to reflect this mandate. The task force created by this action reviewed several integration plans used or suggested by other districts in the nation. None of those plans fit the requirements for Ypsilanti and were subsequently rejected.

Following discussion with elementary school principals and administrative staff the recommendation sent to the board of education was to convert Perry to a preschool and kindergarten building. Kindergarten students from all elementary schools would be sent to Perry. All students above the kindergarten level at Perry would be distributed to the other eight elementary schools.

Continued discussion of this recommendation of the board with parents and community leaders resulted in the following action on June 14, 1976:

It was moved by Dr. Jennings and supported by Mr. Cosgrove that the board of education change the current Perry Elementary School to a Child Development Center housing all kindergarten students in the district, all readiness kindergarten programs, and all pre-school programs, including mandatory special education, and that the current Perry students (grades 1-6) be transported to other elementary schools in the district.

Additional action taken by the board on that same date provided the following guidelines for program development:

It was moved by Mrs. Harrison and supported by Mr. Elliott that the board of education approve the policy governing enrollment at the new Child Development Center, since the center has been created by board action as the official kindergarten and preschool program for the Ypsilanti Public Schools, and that the center will be based on the continuum of curricular and educational services of the school district; and that all students entering the Ypsilanti Public Schools ages 0-6 will be served by the center.

The rationale of the administrative staff and board of education for creating a single preschool and kindergarten building recognized at least two key factors: preschool has been determined to be a significant experience for providing socializing and preparatory-school experiences for children before entering kindergarten. Also, since kindergarten is the first school experience for children, problems associated with older children mingling with kindergartners in the same building would improve their adjustment to the beginning of their school years.

As expected, there were concerns and objections raised by skeptical parents. Most prominent among these objections was that Ypsilanti did not have a race problem and that the burden for change to achieve integration would fall primarily on the Black community whose children were going to be moved to other elementary buildings.

The changes that had to be made at Perry School to accommodate many preschool and kindergarten students required immediate physical changes to its building. Every classroom was equipped with furniture and teaching materials from the kindergarten classrooms at the other eight school buildings. The Perry building was later remodeled and expanded in the early 1980s to fully accommodate all the new programs created by the board, including renaming it the Early Childhood Development Center. Today, it is called the Perry Early Learning Center.

A Note on Sources

Information for this essay comes from the author's personal experience. Additional information comes from an interview with Ypsilanti Community Schools Assistant Superintendent Carlos Lopez, the minutes of the Ypsilanti Board of Education including Board Action #1738 (January 12, 1976) and Board Action #1837 (June 14, 1976), and the Ypsilanti Community Schools website. The photograph is from the Ypsilanti Historical Society Archives.

About the Author

Gerald L. (Jerry) Jennings, Ph.D., is Professor Emeritus of Business and Technology Education at Eastern Michigan University. He was a trustee of the Ypsilanti Public Schools Board of Education from 1972 to 1976.

A New Ypsilanti High School

BY TOM WARNER

Out with the Old

A new high school was built on the southeast corner of Packard and Hewitt, just west of the Ypsilanti School District's administrative center. I remember walking past the location in 1960 when that plot of land was a cornfield. Twelve years later, it opened for the class of 1973.

Various adult education and other programs were housed at the old high school until the 1990s, when it was abandoned. A Michigan firm purchased the property and reconfigured the building as affordable apartment living for those fifty-five years of age and older. In 2002, the rehabilitation of Cross Street Village was completed. The renovation created 104 one- and two-bedroom units with many amenities and modest prices to attract low-income seniors. But twenty years later, with the lapsing of low-income housing tax credits, Cross Street Village apartments are now market-rate rentals. The project has been a big success.

It was a sad day for former students, however, when the gymnasium and auditorium were demolished. The loss of both led to the creation of a courtyard behind the school. It has become a favorite destination for reunions of students who attended school in the building. The transformation of the former high school into an attractive rental option for older downsizing couples and others has been a great gift to the community and a wonderful example of historic preservation at its finest.

Changing Demands

I recall my school day at Estabrook Elementary in the 1950s consisting of a morning session from 8:30-11:30 a.m. with ninety minutes for lunch with afternoons from 1:00-3:30 p.m. There was one fifteen-minute recess period in both morning and afternoon sessions.

Rackham was a nationally known school on the campus of Michigan State Normal



Old Ypsilanti High School, now Cross Street Village, 2022

College (now Eastern Michigan University) that served students with special needs, and because of its reputation, the school attracted families from other states. But I recall that services for special needs children were not available locally at the elementary level.

The junior high and high schools offered extensive extracurricular activities, and these were significantly expanded after the passage of Title IX in 1972, guaranteeing women equal participation in athletics. Today, women students participate in soccer, lacrosse, field hockey, water polo, crew, gymnastics, bowling, synchronized swimming, and equestrian at many schools.

Today, when one reads an administrative directory of schools it is commonplace to see titles such as homeless liaison, marketing coordinator, director of technology, online learning director, resiliency center, and homeless student services. Pre-School/Young Fives programs, as well as meal assistance programs, are offered at both at breakfast and lunch.

In the 1920s, Michigan State Normal College established Roosevelt School on its campus, and this had an important role in the placement and training of student teachers. Roosevelt was known as a laboratory school because of its mission in educating future teachers. Roosevelt was a K-12 institution, and many of its students were the children of college faculty. For this reason, many referred to Roosevelt as “snob hill.” Following a national trend of consolidation, however, the school closed its doors at the end of the 1969 school year.

On a smaller scale, St. John's Catholic Church closed their elementary and high schools during 1970 and 1971.

The appropriateness of mascot names has been a national issue for many years. It reared its head in Ypsilanti in the early 1990s when Ypsilanti High's mascot, the Braves, now became offensive to many. Highly contentious board of education meetings about a name change finally led to the decision to rename the mascot the Phoenix, in November 2007. With the merger of Ypsilanti and Willow Run schools, in 2013, the name was changed again to the Grizzlies.

Then and Now

In the early 1970s, Ypsilanti had eight elementary schools (Erickson, Adams, Woodruff, Perry, Chapelle, Estabrook, Central and Fletcher), East and West Middle Schools (they were originally junior high schools) and the newly built high school. The Willow Run District had six elementary schools (Cheney, Ford, Holmes, Kaiser, Kettering, and Thurston), Edmonson Middle School, and Willow Run High School.

Today, only seven elementary schools remain in the consolidated Ypsilanti Community Schools. Three of these are K-1 schools: Beatty Early Learning Center (named for Eugene Beatty, longtime Ypsilanti educator and principal of Perry Elementary), Ford Early Learning Center, and Perry Early Learning Center. The other elementary schools enroll up to the fifth grade and are Erickson, Holmes, Estabrook, and the Ypsilanti International Elementary School (formerly Adams). Ford and Holmes are the only former Willow Run schools

East Middle School is now open as the sole Ypsilanti Community Middle School while West Middle is home to the Washtenaw International High School and Middle Academy. A new middle school was built in the Willow Run District around 2005, but it closed after the merger. Ypsilanti High on Packard Road now serves as the one and only high school.

Washtenaw International High School and Middle Academy deserves special recognition. It is "a public consortium International Baccalaureate Middle School and High School for academically focused students from school districts in Washtenaw, Ingham, Jackson, Lenawee, Livingston, Monroe, Oakland, and Wayne Counties." In September 2022, it served 569 students in grades nine through twelve, with a student ratio of 16 to 1. One ranking system placed it 2 of 780 in "Best Public High School Teachers in Michigan," while *U.S. News and World Reports* ranked it 4 of 783 "Best Public High Schools in Michigan."

Former School Buildings

A few of the many former schools that have been sold in the last thirty years or more include:

The Elizabeth Fletcher Elementary School on Cornell is an outstanding example of a building that was purchased, repurposed, and continues to be a success story. Named Cornell Elementary School when it first opened, in 1963, it was subsequently renamed after an early Ypsilanti educator, Elizabeth Fletcher, who served on the school board from 1910 to 1920. In 2009, EMU purchased Fletcher School for \$2.2 million. It is now the Autism Collaborative and Children's Institute, serving approximately 150 children from 18 months to six years of age.

In March 2010, the Ypsilanti Board of Education voted to close Ernest T. Chapelle Elementary School, on South Wallace Street, the oldest elementary school in the district. Cost savings were always an issue, but in the case of Chapelle, it was the school with "the lowest capacity and is less than a mile from Estabrook." In 2016, the Ypsilanti Schools Foundation Resale Shop found a home in Chapelle. It also was the site of the Salvation Army, with its grade-school family distribution center. It is now known as the Chapelle Business Center with community groups in various classrooms. A February 2020 article by Chanel Stitt at mlive.com reports that "the building's former classrooms now house educational programs, churches, a human rights resource center, and even a gardening operation. Antioch Church, Mentor2Youth, Willow Run Arches, Bottles-n-Backpacks and the YMCA are among organizations now operating out of the space."

One of the groups using the Chapelle Elementary School deserves attention. The Ypsilanti YMCA Child Development Center is devoted to the care of children from eighteen months to five years old and is uniquely supported by the Ypsilanti Community Schools, the Ypsilanti Housing Commission, Eastern Michigan University, and the Ann Arbor YMCA.

Woodruff's Grove was Ypsilanti's original name, so it is not surprising that several iterations of Woodruff School on East Michigan have been constructed. The school was sold in 1981 to the Word of God Community, for \$150,000. The school on the site became New Beginnings Academy, until its closure in 2018. CHS Group LLC, a health care provider, now occupies the building.

Declining Enrollments

There are many factors contributing to this decline in numbers, all with varying degrees of importance and affect. The presence of private schools in Washtenaw County have had only limited impact. Greenhills and the Rudolph Steiner School, in Ann Arbor, are two of the most well-known institutions in Washtenaw County, but their tuition costs are beyond the reach of most families in our area. In addition, there are many private schools, some with and some without the prohibitive tuition requirements. Many are church based.

Schools of choice was introduced in Michigan, in 1996, by the state legislature, responding to parents wanting a more active role in deciding where their children will



New Ypsilanti Community High School, 2022

be educated. Ann Arbor, Saline, Dexter, and Chelsea districts all participate in schools of choice. These schools are held in such high regard that they entice many families and are a factor in the enrollment decline in Ypsilanti schools. Admittance does have conditions attached, however. The number of students is limited by the district, sometimes by using a lottery method, and transportation is not provided by the chosen district.

Michigan governor John Engler signed into law, in 1994, the provisions establishing the creation of charter schools, also called Public Service Academies. Nine charter schools opened that fall. By the 1997-98 academic year, 106 charter schools had been formed with the cap of 150 on schools reached, in 1999. Governor Rick Snyder passed legislation removing this cap on charter schools, in 2011, and now there are more than 300 schools with over 150,000 students in the state. Nearly 80% of Michigan's charter schools are run by for-profit entities. A distinct profit motive leads to significantly lower teacher salaries and a lack of services beyond classroom instruction. Charter schools have a certain cachet, and this has had a serious effect on the declining enrollment in the Ypsilanti Community Schools.

I hope to have successfully shared some meaningful thoughts and memories as "one who has an abiding love for Ypsilanti" and that you will proceed further to learn more about these topics.

A Note on Sources

All images are provided by the Ypsilanti Historical Society Archives.

About the Author

As with both parents and three siblings Tom Warner was born, raised, and largely educated in Ypsilanti. His respect and love of his hometown thus came naturally, and history was his chosen field of study. He graduated with honors from Eastern Michigan University in 1971, and deeply considered doctoral studies at the University of Michigan in Musicology. Even with extensive travels to Europe, the Near East, and Asia, he has always returned to the Ypsilanti area. He eagerly became a member of the Ypsilanti History Society, and he invites everyone to do the same!

The Consolidation of Ypsilanti Public and Willow Run Community Schools

BY SCOTT A. MENZEL

The Need to Consolidate

A quality public education system is the backbone of a strong and vibrant community. Ypsilanti historically had three school districts serving families: Ypsilanti Public, Willow Run Community, and Lincoln Consolidated. In November 2012, voters in Ypsilanti Public Schools and Willow Run Community Schools approved a consolidation proposal, with 61% of the voters in both communities supporting the effort. On July 1, 2013, the Ypsilanti Community School District was born. This essay is designed to provide a review of the historical context for that consequential decision along with recognizing some of the key people who made it possible.

The question of whether to consolidate school districts is never an easy one. While the Ypsilanti Public School District started in the mid-1800s, the Willow Run Community School District was a byproduct of the growth around the Willow Run bomber plant during World War II. Even then, discussions about a single district serving the region were considered.

In 1964, the Michigan Legislature passed Public Act 289: Reorganization of School Districts. Each intermediate school district was required to convene a committee on reorganization. Minutes from those meetings in Washtenaw County note conversations about creating a single district for the entire county, as well as the suggestion that Ypsilanti and Willow Run should be a single district. Notwithstanding conversations over the years regarding the advantages of being a single district, it wasn't until the aftermath of the great recession in 2008 that the struggles of the two districts led to a move from conversation to action.



Joint meeting of Ypsilanti and Willow Run school boards to place consolidation on the ballot, August 8, 2012. L-R: Laura Lisiski (Willow Run Superintendent), Scott Menzel (Washtenaw ISD Superintendent), Representative Bill Rogers (Brighton), Dedrick Martin (Ypsilanti Superintendent), and Representative David Rutledge (Ypsilanti).

Making It Happen

In June 2011, the superintendents and board presidents of Ypsilanti Public and Willow Run Community Schools met with me, in my role as the incoming superintendent of the Washtenaw Intermediate School District, to discuss how the ISD could support the two districts, given they were both financially bankrupt and struggling with academic achievement. While the initial conversation focused on the potential of shared services, the nature of the challenges led to a recognition that no amount of combined services could erase the underlying structural challenges.

Each district was losing students, which further exacerbated funding challenges. The need to reduce programs and cut compensation for employees led to additional enrollment declines and an ongoing challenge related to attracting and retaining quality staff. This was referred to as the “death spiral” during community conversations regarding the need for a fresh start. The system of funding in Michigan (districts receiving funding on a per-pupil basis), combined with the expansion of school choice and charters, led to an environment where urban districts like Ypsilanti and Willow Run found themselves in a precarious position.

It took tremendous courage for the two school board presidents (David Bates of Ypsilanti and Don Garrett of Willow Run), along with the two superintendents (Dedrick Martin of Ypsilanti and Laura Lisinski of Willow Run), to engage in conver-

sations about consolidation. The topic often led to intense discussions throughout each community, given the storied past of both districts and the deep sense of pride and identity each community had related to its school district. At the same time, the reality was that endless cutting of budgets and programs was undermining the ability of each district to provide the quality education the students needed and deserved.

Absent the willingness of these leaders to engage in the crucial conversation related to consolidation, it is likely that Willow Run would have been dissolved as a district (a fate that Buena Vista and Inkster experienced shortly after the consolidation was approved) and that Ypsilanti would have been taken over by an emergency manager (as happened to several other deficit districts), and the citizens of Ypsilanti and Willow Run would have lost control of their public school system.

While courageous leadership was necessary for the consolidation effort to get off the ground, there were also policy considerations at the state level that were necessary for success. This is where the work of State Representatives David Rutledge (Ypsilanti) and Bill Rogers (Brighton, chair of the K–12 Appropriations Committee) became critically important. Representative Rutledge was a tireless advocate in Lansing for funding and policy changes that would help ensure that the new district had the supports necessary to succeed. This included helping to secure more than six million dollars in a consolidation grant and facilitating a restructuring of the operational debt into a manageable repayment plan that allowed the consolidated district to begin with a fresh start and not remain in deficit status.

A Decade Later

Consolidations in Michigan are rare and typically involve small and rural districts. The consolidation of Ypsilanti and Willow Run was unique in scope and magnitude. Now, a decade after the voters approved the merger, Ypsilanti Community Schools continues to provide educational opportunities for the families in the community, and it has reversed the financial and academic decline that necessitated the consolidation vote. The willingness of key leaders to take on the difficult challenge, setting aside the potential impact on them personally and professionally, resulted in a school district merger that has weathered the test of time and validates the vision they had for improved learning opportunities for students in Ypsilanti.

A Note on Sources

This essay is drawn from Scott A. Menzel's dissertation, "The Consolidation of Ypsilanti Public and Willow Run Community Schools: Lessons Learned and Policy Considerations," which was submitted for his Ph.D. in Leadership and Counseling, which he received from Eastern Michigan University in 2016. The image is provided by the author.

About the Author

Scott A. Menzel, Ph.D., was the superintendent of the Washtenaw Intermediate School District from 2011 to 2020. During this time, he had the honor of being an active participant in supporting the consolidation efforts. He was also honored to serve as the first superintendent of the newly consolidated district from July 1, 2013, to June 30, 2014.

A City of Champions

Ypsilanti High School Athletics

BY TINO LAMBROS

On Your Mark

In the 1898-99 edition of *The Ypsi Dixit*, Ypsilanti High School's first yearbook, these prophetic words appeared:

Athletics may be regarded as a very small part of high school work, and yet for some reason it is being regarded by the colleges of the U.S. more and more as something that is necessary, and therefore to be encouraged. And it needs encouragement. In our high school of over two hundred pupils, with the number steadily increasing, is there any reason why we should not join the State Athletic Association as well as the State Oratorical Association, in which we made so marked an entrance this year? To be sure, no such success could be expected at first; it would take several years of hard training to get the high school accustomed to it and to establish the idea that a man must train as soon as he enters the school.

Although there doesn't seem to have been an athletic department or any official coaches at this time, there was an Athletic Association led by students Arthur Holmes, William Sherman, and Atwood McAndrew. This was the first year that Ypsilanti High School (YHS) fielded football, track, and baseball teams.

The 1897 football team didn't seem to have a coach but elected Clarence Holley to be captain-in-charge. The 1898 baseball team was having a successful season with a 4-1 record at the time their yearbook was printed. Enrollment at YHS was 265 students, grades 9 to 12.

Get Set, Go!

In 1921, Ypsilanti High School had the area's first outstanding athlete. George Haggarty

led YHS to a “Top 8” finish in basketball. He was named to All-Tournament and All-State Teams. Later, a panel convened to review Michigan high school basketball history and pick a “Mr. Michigan Basketball Through the Ages.” *The Detroit Free Press* selected George Haggarty! He set records in both the low and high hurdles in what would become the state track tournament. He went on to be “All Big Ten” in both baseball and basketball at the University of Michigan.

Ypsilanti grew in the first quarter of the twentieth century. Michigan State Normal College (later Eastern Michigan University) established a teacher training laboratory school on its campus. In 1923, Normal High School opened and graduated its first class, in 1926, as the Roosevelt Rough Riders.

In 1924, Lincoln Consolidated Schools opened. Lincoln was the first multi-township school in Michigan and the first rural consolidated school in the United States affiliated with a teacher college (Michigan Normal). The Lincoln “Rail Splitters” became the third major high school in the Ypsilanti area, all with developing athletic departments.

In 1925, a State Track and Field Tournament was held. Two Roosevelt runners qualified for the event: Jay House in the mile run (he placed fifth) and Bud Giles in the quarter-mile run.

In 1929, the Huron League was formed, bringing together eight Class C high schools along or near the Huron River. The Lincoln Rail Splitters and the Roosevelt Rough Riders were charter members. Lincoln was represented on the founding committee by coach and teacher Larry Dunning, while Roosevelt was represented by athletic director Arthur D. Walker.

By 1930, the forerunner of the Michigan High School Athletic Association (MHSAA), felt it was necessary to standardize and bring continuity to high school sports across the state. It defined the high school football season then expanded to issues such as player residency rules, eligibility, age, and more. There were only four sports: football, basketball, track, and baseball. Today, the MHSAA oversees twenty-eight sports played by both men and women.

When Henry Ford built the Willow Run Bomber Plant southeast of Ypsilanti, thousands of workers and their families arrived from all over. Needing housing, the U.S. government built a new residential community northeast of Ypsilanti and named it Willow Run in honor of the bomber plant. A K-12 school district was formed to educate the workers’ children and Willow Run High School soon became the area’s fourth high school. Later, St. John the Baptist Catholic Church added a high school. With St. John High School, the area had five high schools, all with athletic departments.

An attraction for young Ypsilanti athletes came in the 1950s and early 1960s when Ypsilanti native and successful businessman Walter O. “Spike” Briggs became owner of the Detroit Tigers. He built an athletic facility on the Eastern Michigan University campus and named it Briggs Hall. To the east of Briggs Hall was a Briggs Stadium

for baseball and a Briggs Stadium for football. The latter served as pre-season training facilities for the Detroit Lions. Practices and facilities were open for all to watch. Young athletes spent hours observing professional athletes train. This was something special to witness, and they got to know the pros by their first names. The student athletes were able to talk with and get the autographs of their heroes, including Doak Walker, Bobby Layne, Howard “Hopalong” Cassidy, Yale Lary, Joe Schmidt, and more. It is difficult to measure the influence they had on young athletes. Several Ypsilanti area high schools used the Briggs football stadium for their games.

Winning Teams

On the Huron League’s twenty-fifty anniversary in 1955, a history of the league was published by long-time *Ypsilanti Press* sportswriter Wallace “Scoop” Durfee and the Huron League’s founding members. Highlights of the first twenty-five years of the league include:

Football. Although neither Lincoln nor Roosevelt won Huron League championships in football, it was noted that Milan won two football and three basketball championships led by Head Coach Ron Isbell. Isbell later spent many years at YHS as a teacher and coach, and he was inducted into the Ypsilanti Community Schools Athletic Hall of Fame, in 2005. Ypsilanti High School was state champion in 1946, 1947, and 1948.

Boys Swimming. The rivalry between Ypsilanti and Roosevelt was intense from 1930 to 1950. YHS coaches James Schaffer and Christy Wilson won eight state championships and had eight second-place finishes. RHS coaches Howard Farnslow and Phillip McLane won two state championships and had two second-place finishes.

Wrestling. Ypsilanti High School won state championships in 1956, 1961, 1962, and 1964. It also had several second- and third-place finishes with Coach Bert Waterman.

Track and Field. Ypsilanti High boys were state champions in 1925 and 1948 (Coach Ralph Deetz) and runners-up three seasons from 2005 to 2011. With Coach Lamar Miller, Willow Run High School was boys’ state champion in 1959 and 1964. The high school took second place in 1965. Ypsilanti High was 2004 girls’ state champion with four second-place finishes from 1990 to 2008, with Coach Tom Micallef

Baseball. Ypsilanti High School was 1986 state champion, with Coach Pat Dignan.

Golf. Ypsilanti High School was 1975 state champion, with Coach Claude Wilbanks.

All Stars

Many local high school athletes went on to professional careers. They include:

Lowell Perry. Lowell graduated from Ypsilanti High School in 1949. He was an All-American football player at the University of Michigan and was drafted by the Pittsburgh Steelers. He was being talked about as “Rookie of the Year,” when he suffered a serious career-ending injury.



Lowell Perry YHS Football,
Basketball, and Track, 1948

Don Schwall. Graduating in 1954, Don was an Ypsilanti High School three-sport all-state athlete. He accepted a basketball scholarship to the University of Oklahoma. After attending a Boston Red Sox tryout, Don signed as a pitcher. In 1961 he was voted the American League's "Rookie of the Year" and pitched three innings in the 1961 All-Star game, striking out Stan Musial, the last batter he faced.

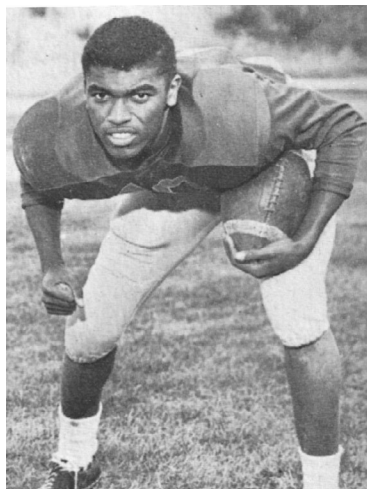
Michael Bass. Graduating in 1963, Michael was another Ypsilanti High School three-sport athlete. He played football at the University of Michigan and was signed by the Washington Red Skins (now Commanders). He played for ten years, earning All-Pro honors. He played in the 1973 Super Bowl and scored Washington's

only touchdown on a famous intercepted pass. He was named as one of the Top-70 Red Skin players of all time. In 2022 his name was added to the "Ring of Fame" at the Commander's Fed EX Field.

Rodney Holman. Graduating in 1978, Rodney was an Ypsilanti High School football player and two-time wrestling state champion. He played football at Tulane University and was an All-Pro tight end playing in the 1989 Super Bowl for the Cincinnati Bengals. He is a member of the Tulane Hall of Fame and the Greater New Orleans's Sports Hall of Fame.

Bob Sutton. Bob was a St. John High School graduate who became a football coaching legend. He began in 1972 as an assistant to University of Michigan's Bo Schembechler and moved on to several colleges, including eight years as head coach at West Point. He then moved on to pro football, where he is currently senior defensive assistant for the Jacksonville Jaguars.

C. Robert Arvin. Bob was a 1961 graduate from Ypsilanti High School. His high school wrestling team won a state championship, and he individually won a state championship. Arvin attended West Point, where he was a member of their wrestling team. While there, he was First Captain and Brigade Commander of his 1965



Michael Bass, YHS Football,
Basketball, and Track, 1963

graduating class. In 2005, one of the largest buildings at West Point was named in his honor: The Arvin Cadet Physical Development Center.

A Lasting Legacy

For more than a century, numerous athletes in the Ypsilanti area high schools have distinguished themselves. Currently, the Ypsilanti Community Schools Athletic Hall of Fame boasts 172 individual inductees and two state championship teams from Ypsilanti High School and Willow Run High School. Many local athletic fields were named in honor of local athletes including Moffett, Shadford, Devlin, and Wright.

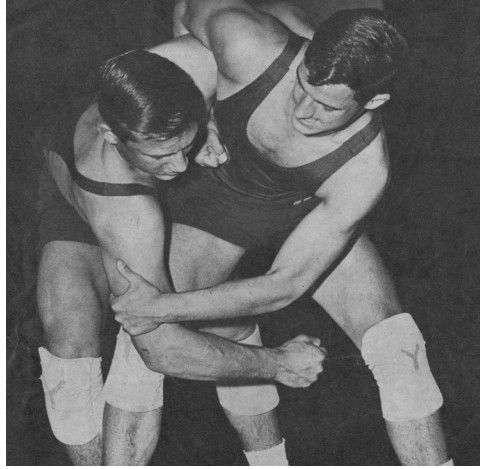
These student athletes grew up in Ypsilanti. They played and honed their skills on the sandlots and empty fields around town. Any empty field could be adapted to a sport. A tree was a goal line; a rock or two, a base; a sidewalk or a street, an out-of-bounds line. Teams were composed of whoever showed up. A baseball might be a worn-out old ball taped and re-taped. Bats were rare and often broken, and a boy could try to tape up the crack or repair the break with a wood screw. Games lasted until the equipment broke or the owner of the ball or bat had to go home.

Ypsilanti parks grew and neighborhoods built better fields. With ball fields for all ages, including evening adult softball, Recreation Park was the busiest. Families from all area schools could be found there. Other nearby parks were West Willow, Parkridge, Appleridge, Prospect, Washington Square, Woodruff, Harvest Lane, Riverside, Harvest Moon, and Candy Cane.

This is our legacy. Many came before us that we never knew, but they were the pioneers of high school athletics, our unknown heroes. We are standing on the shoulders of those who came before us. With luck, current athletes will offer their shoulders to the future high school stars of Ypsilanti.

A Note on Sources

Information for this essay came from the Ypsilanti High School yearbook *The Dixit*; the Roosevelt High School yearbook *Hillcrest*; and the *History of the Huron League: 25th Anniversary, 1929-55*, all of which can be found at the YHS Archives. Additional information was taken from online sources, including the Washtenaw Country Club website,



C. Robert Arvin (right), YHS Football, Wrestling, and Track, 1961, here with Joe Arcure

Lincoln High School website, MHSAA archives, and the Ypsilanti Community Schools Athletic Hall of Fame files, which include information on Hall of Fame inductees. All images are provided by the Ypsilanti Historical Society Archives.

About the Author

Tino Lambros is a lifelong Ypsilanti resident. He played little league sports, earned letters in three Ypsilanti High School sports, taught in the Ypsilanti school system, coached wrestling at the former West Junior High and Ypsilanti High School, and is chair of the Ypsilanti Community Schools Athletic Hall of Fame.

A Time of Tradition and a Time of Change

EMU, 1973–2023

BY JOHN G. McCURDY

Snapshot: 1973

When classes began at Eastern Michigan University (EMU) in September 1973, *The Eastern Echo* bemoaned the fact that enrollment had fallen to 18,392 students. The school newspaper also highlighted the work of the Office of Minority Affairs which aimed “to solve problems, create racial justice.”

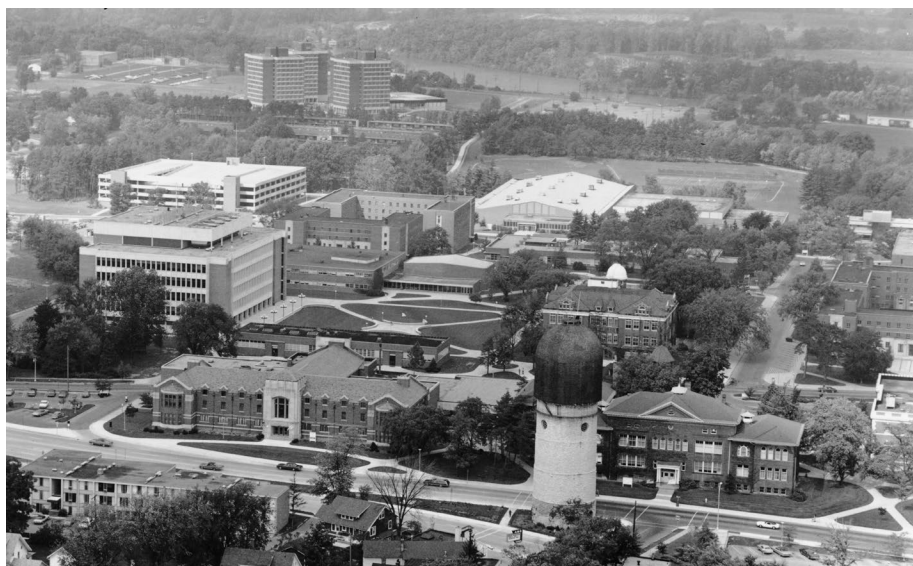
In 1973, eighteen-year-olds celebrated their new constitutional right to vote, and political awareness touched Eastern. The *Aurora* yearbook carried an article titled “Abortion: Arousing Many Emotions,” while President Harold Sponberg helped celebrate the university’s first American Indian Heritage and Awareness Week. Yet the biggest issue was parking. “It’s a big hassle...it costs a lot of money,” complained one student.

Fifty years later, much at Eastern Michigan University has changed and much has stayed the same. The university has grown and shrunk, and student groups have come and gone, yet through it all, EMU has remained the educational heart of Ypsilanti.

They Boogied and Won!

The spirit of the ’70s infused Eastern Michigan University fifty years ago. Chicago; Arlo Guthrie; Earth, Wind & Fire; and the Black Gospel Choir performed on campus, while students debated impeachment, stagflation, and the bicentennial. The EMU Band made its way into the *Guinness Book of World Records* when it played for fifty consecutive hours in February 1976. An interest in space movies brought Dr. J. L. Hynek to campus to speak on *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*, which his research had inspired. Omega Psi Phi won the *Aurora*’s group picture award in 1975 for boogying, while the theme of the 1979 Homecoming was “A Natural Hi!”

EMU also expanded far beyond its roots as a teacher’s school. The College of Human



Eastern Michigan University, c. 1973

Services was added in 1975 and the College of Technology in 1980. Music students found a home in the new Alexander Building, while the new Psychology of Sex class enrolled 103 students.

Change was afoot in the 1970s. With African Americans constituting six percent of students in the mid-1970s, the Black Student Association demanded greater inclusion on campus, an initiative supported by the Chicano Student Association and the American Indian Student Association. The spirit of feminism saw Mary Schmitt elected the first female president of the student body in 1974, although a day-long strike of women termed “Alice Doesn’t Day” fizzled out. The Movement for the Physically Exceptional brought attention to disability rights. The culmination of such activism was Humanitarian Days, a campus-wide effort to make every student “aware of humanity, or the lack of, in society.”

Former Michigan lieutenant governor James Brickley led EMU through the contentious era. In October 1977, students boycotted registration when a new rule required them to pay half their tuition up front, and two years later, the faculty union brought the university to a standstill with a two-week strike. Students protested when EMU discontinued its bus service, while severe winter weather led President Jimmy Carter to declare much of Michigan a disaster area. No wonder Brickley left in 1978 for another term as lieutenant governor.

The Decade of Advancement

In 1979, John Porter was named president of Eastern Michigan University, making him

the first African American to hold this position. Porter's arrival initiated a period of sustained growth on campus labeled "the decade of achievement" by university promoters.

A new spirit was evident when the *Aurora* dubbed the 1980 Homecoming "a time of tradition and a time of change." Alongside the bonfire, pep rally, and powder puff football game, students elected their first Homecoming king, enjoyed a laser demonstration, and giggled at "the Bong Show." In the years that followed, childcare was established at Snow Health Center, while the Home Economics Association began raising money for scholarships, announcing: "We've come a long way from stitchers and sewers!" In 1988, Phelps/Sellers dorms went co-ed.

Life on campus in the 1980s was active. Each September, fraternities competed in the Float-a-Thon down the Huron River, and athletes played on the new IM field. In winter, students huddled inside trying to solve Rubik's Cube, or headed to Pizza Huts and local taverns to play video games like Space Invaders. Various groups took turns painting "the Kiosk," a thirteen-foot-high cylindrical structure that already had an estimated 3,500 coats of paint by 1984. Others served their country through ROTC, and in November 1990, fifty-eight EMU reservists were called up for Operation Desert Shield.

McKenny Union was the "soul of campus" with shops, restaurants, game rooms, and a bowling alley. McKenny's fiftieth was celebrated with a 1930s-themed Golden Ball in 1981, and updates including a computer lab followed a decade later. Off campus, students headed to Suds (Factory) and the Spaghetti Bender, while establishments north of campus led Cross Street to be labeled: "The place where EMU and Ypsilanti shake hands."

Students were politically active throughout the 1980s. Anti-apartheid activism appeared when students picketed the 1982 Homecoming game to demand that South African heart surgeon Dr. Christian Barnard not be allowed to speak on campus. Three years later, student protests led the Board of Regents to withdraw from an investment fund that did business in South Africa.

Rosa Parks and Betty Shabazz spoke on campus, while a decade-long effort led to the creation of the Multi-Cultural Center in 1990, which aimed to help African American, Hispanic, and Native American students navigate life at Eastern. Whether the Huron mascot was racially insensitive was "one of the top stories on EMU's campus" in the late 1980s. In February 1985, the Gay Students Association was established "to battle the discrimination and lonely feelings that gay students face," while the AIDS crisis led to the installation of condom machines in public bathrooms.

The decade of advancement was also a time of growth. The number of students enrolled at EMU topped 20,000 for the first time in Fall 1984, and this growth continued throughout the 1980s, such that by 1987, EMU had the third largest undergraduate enrollment in Michigan. As numbers rose, so too did student quality and achievement. In 1984, EMU opened the Honors College, and five years later, the university awarded its first doctorate in education.

The higher enrollments led to a need for more space. “Crowded. That was the feeling on campus last year,” lamented the *Aurora* in 1988. In response, EMU expanded south of Cross Street. By 1991, the Corporate Education Center at I-94 and Huron Road had opened, as had the Gary M. Owen College of Business on Michigan Avenue.

Campus Moves Toward Future

Despite the growth of Eastern Michigan University, the financial burdens on the students began to grow. When William E. Shelton became EMU president in 1989, he faced declining state appropriations and a series of tuition hikes. In response, the university sought money from donors. In 1981, radio station WEMU raised \$47,000 to keep operating, and three years later, singer Barry Manilow donated \$5000 for a music endowment. Nevertheless, tuition kept rising, doubling between 1983 and 1993, and increasing eighteen percent in 2001 alone.

The *Aurora* yearbook celebrated its hundredth annual issue in 1993 and was then promptly discontinued. The *Eastern Echo* promised that the yearbook would take on a “new format” of a magazine and video recording, but this failed to materialize. Civil rights continued to be an important issue, and the university marked the birthday of Martin Luther King, Jr., with events and speakers. However, students complained that these celebrations conflicted with their classes, so in November 1994, the Student Organization for African American Unity announced a boycott of classes. Thereafter, EMU would cancel all classes on MLK Day. Native American students held an annual Pow Wow “to educate, entertain” beginning in 1991.

In 1993, the *Eastern Echo* reported an “older, more racially diverse student body” on campus. African American enrollment neared ten percent, and four Black fraternities and four Black sororities appeared. There were more non-traditional students as older enrollees completed bachelor’s degrees or pursued graduate studies.

As the millennium approached, EMU remained a place of political engagement. An AIDS support group appeared, and the university offered HIV testing at Snow. “Coming Out Week” encouraged LGBTQ+ students to be visible, while the university protested violence against women at an annual Take Back the Night March and Rally. Students concerned for the environment worked to clean up the Huron River, while others raised money to fight hunger and homelessness. EMU canceled classes after the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, as faculty, counselors, and student groups helped the community grapple with a changed world.

Presidential politics were particularly exciting at EMU in the 1990s. The Rev. Jesse Jackson visited twice to encourage students to vote and to “hold character above color.” The election of Bill Clinton convinced the *Aurora* that “1992 will forever be remembered as the year of change,” and such sanguine opinions of Clinton amplified when the president spoke to 4500 at the Bowen Field House on October 30, 1996. Clinton



Alpha Phi Alpha members at the Martin Luther King Bust, 1996

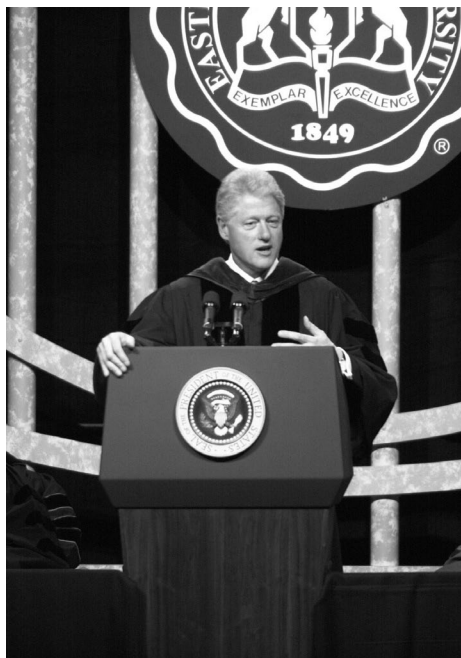
returned to campus in April 2000 to deliver the commencement address at graduation.

As Eastern Michigan's sesquicentennial approached in 1999, the *Eastern Echo* announced: "Campus moves toward future." Following a student protest against inadequate facilities, EMU opened the Bruce T. Halle Library in 1998. The Convocation Center began operations that same year, as did a new student center in 2006.

By far, the most controversial new building project was University House, a 10,000-square-foot residence and event space built in 2001. President Samuel Kirkpatrick drew a sharp rebuke for the project's price. Kirkpatrick initially claimed that University House would cost \$3.5 million, but when the final tally came in at \$6 million, the Faculty Senate issued a vote of no confidence and Kirkpatrick resigned in disgrace.

Education First

In 2005, John A. Fallon III became EMU's president and promised "to restore the university's image and uphold standards of integrity." Unfortunately, Fallon was soon engulfed in scandal when undergraduate student Laura Dickinson was found dead in her room in Hill Hall in December 2006. Although the university initially announced that there was "no reason to suspect foul play," it came out that Dickinson had been murdered, which led EMU to be accused of not disclosing campus crime information. In 2007, the Board of Regents fired John Fallon, as well as several other administrators, and EMU was fined \$357,500, the largest amount ever levied against a university for



President Bill Clinton at Commencement,
2000

violating the Clery Act.

Susan Martin became EMU president in 2008. Martin was first woman to hold this position, a somewhat surprising delay for a university that has been majority female since its founding. Under Martin, the university's strengths were promoted with a new advertising campaign that promised "Education First." In 2016, Martin was succeeded by James Smith, who remains Eastern's president today.

Enrollment reached 23,000 as the twenty-first century began, and the university continued to invest in its campus buildings. Following the construction of the new student center, McKenny Hall was repurposed for advising and classes. The College of Health and Human Services occupied Everett L. Marshall Building in 2000,

while Pray-Harrold and Mark Jefferson were renovated between 2007 and 2011.

The student body continued to diversify. In Fall 2021, students of color made up around thirty percent of enrollees, and international students made up about three percent. When racist graffiti appeared on several buildings in 2016, students and faculty marched for justice at the campus's Martin Luther King, Jr., Plaza. In December 2020, the theatre building was renamed the Judy Sturgis Hill building in honor of an African American alumna and longtime Communications, Media, and Theatre Arts professor.

Snapshot: 2023

Fifty years later, Eastern Michigan University is different and yet not so different from what it was in 1973. Currently, around 15,000 students are enrolled, and they still complain about parking and tuition. New programs continued to be added, and a new set of dormitories is under construction. After 174 years, EMU remains the educational heart of Ypsilanti.

A Note on Sources

Information for this essay comes from the *Aurora* yearbooks and the *Eastern Echo*, both of which can be accessed at the EMU Archives. Additional information comes from

the EMU website, and *EMU Today*. Images come from the EMU Archives and can be found at: <https://www.flickr.com/photos/emuarchives/albums>.

About the Author

John G. McCurdy is professor of history at Eastern Michigan University where he has taught since 2005. McCurdy is a historian of early America and the author of *Citizen Bachelors: Manhood and the Creation of the United States* (2009) and *Quarters: The Accommodation of the British Army and the Coming of the American Revolution* (2019).

EMU Athletics Turns in Exciting Fifty Years of Excellence

BY JIM STREETER

The Eagles Take Flight

Eastern Michigan University has sponsored intercollegiate athletic competition for more than 130 years, and while there have been plenty of success stories during that time frame, the last fifty have been exceptional for the school, the city of Ypsilanti, and the state of Michigan.

The years from 1973 through the present have seen the athletic program turn in a record-breaking number of championships, upgrade its entire physical plant, and develop a major presence on the local, state, national, and international stages.

Perhaps two of the most important developments in EMU's athletic history began in the 1970s. One of those major moves was EMU joining the Mid-American Conference (MAC) in competition in 1973. The university became a proud member of the league, automatically gaining NCAA Division I status, after enjoying great success in the NCAA Division II or College Division classification. By agreeing to join the MAC, EMU partnered with a group of like-minded universities in similar-sized communities in the Midwest who all had common goals of promoting strong athletic competition.

Another major decision was the announcement that, starting in 1976, EMU would offer athletic scholarships to women's varsity student-athletes, which enabled ten women's athletic teams to join their ten male counterparts as varsity squads to compete in Division I.

The move to the MAC has evolved into a fifty-year competitive streak for EMU that has seen the varsity athletic teams lead the league in total team championships, recording 155 titles, 117 for the men's squads and 38 for the women's teams.

Student-Athlete Excellence

The past fifty-year period has included a multitude of individual and team athletic

highlights. In the 1970s, the baseball team jumpstarted EMU's success by turning the program into a national power under legendary head coach Ron Oestrike, a member of the American Association of Baseball Coaches Hall of Fame. The 1975 and 1976 Oestrike-coached squads reached the pinnacle of college baseball by qualifying for the NCAA College World Series. The team finished fifty in 1975 and made it all the way to the championship bracket in 1976 before taking a runner-up spot.

The 1987–88 school year was a special one for EMU's football and men's basketball teams. The footballers won the MAC title and represented the conference in the California Raisin Bowl in Fresno, California. The then-Hurons went into the game as a 17-point underdog against San Jose State University and stunned the nation with a 30–27 win.

Later in the 1987–88 season, the men's hoops squad won the MAC and qualified for its first-ever NCAA Division I Tournament berth. Eastern would lose a close contest to the University of Pittsburgh in that game.

The football team would move on from the California Bowl victory in 1987 to be invited to post-season bowl games in 2016 (Bahamas Bowl), 2018 (Camellia Bowl), 2019 (Quick Lane Bowl), and 2021 (Lending Tree Bowl).

Meanwhile, the men's basketball team enjoyed great success of its own after that initial NCAA Tournament appearance. Eastern made it all the way to the Sweet Sixteen of the 1990–91 tourney, defeated Duke in the first round of the 1997–98 tournament, and qualified for the 1998–99 NCAA Big Dance.

Not to be outdone, the EMU women's basketball team qualified for NCAA post-season play twice, in 2003–4 and 2011–12 after capturing MAC titles both times. Sarah VanMetre, a freshman on the '03–04 team, would go on to earn Academic All-American honors in 2006–7. Tavelyn James, a senior on the '11–12 squad, was named to the United States Pan-American Games team in 2011.



Ron Oestrike, EMU baseball coach from 1965 to 1987

Professional Quality

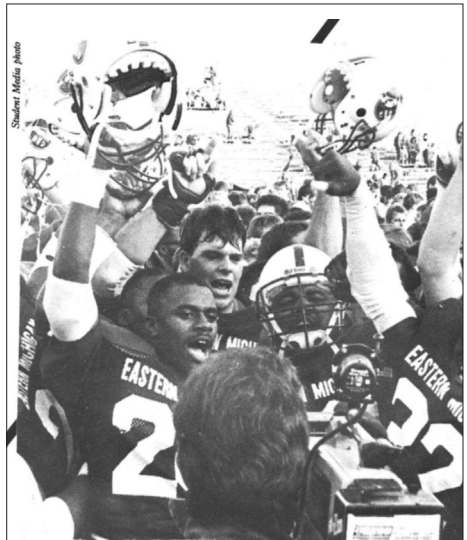
Eastern Michigan athletics advanced in the rarefied air of Olympic Games competition. The university produced men's and women's participants in sixteen consecutive Olympics dating back to 1960, when hurdler Hayes Jones was third in the 110-meter hurdles and came back to win in 1965. Over the past fifty years, another coaching legend, Bob Parks, coached sprinter Hasely Crawford into setting the bar high, earning the title of "World's Fastest Human" in 1976 by winning the 100-meter dash at the games in Montreal. He would go on to qualify for three more Olympics. Eastern's Earl Jones captured the Bronze Medal, placing third in the 800 meters at the 1984 games in Los Angeles. Clement Chukwu ran on the 4x200-meter relay team that was second in 2000, Nduka Awazie was on a 4x400-meter relay team that was second, and women's track star Savatheda Fynes won two medals, a gold on a 4x400-meter team in 2000 and a silver on a 4x400-meter team in 1996.

EMU athletics has also been the beneficiary of major successes in professional baseball with former pitchers Bob Welch and Bob Owchinko following up their baseball team success in Ypsilanti with their own recognition. Welch was the winner of the Cy Young Award in 1995 as the American League's top hurler, and Owchinko was named National League Rookie Pitcher of the Year in 1977.

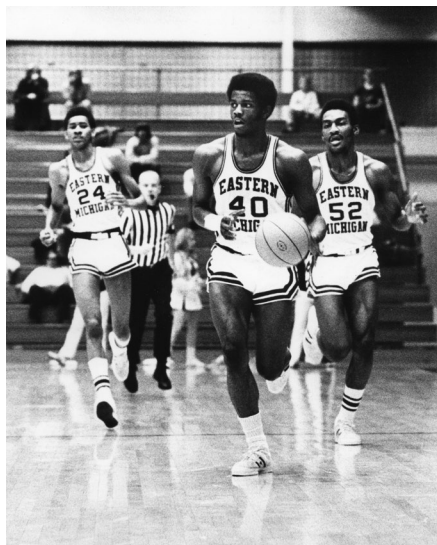
The football program has produced thirteen football standouts representing eight Super Bowl champion teams. Maxx Crosby, a second-round NFL pick in 2019, recently became the only EMU graduate to earn All-Pro honors in the NFL.

The Grounds for Success

Facilities have also been a major contributor to EMU's athletic success. Since 1973, Rynearson Football Stadium has undergone several upgrades to reach its current 30,000-seat configuration. A brand new Student Athletic Performance Center was added in 2019 in the north end of the stadium. The Olds/Marshall/Parks Outdoor Track has hosted numerous national and local events over the past fifty years. The EMU Indoor Practice Facility, the St. Joe's Sports Dome, located next to Rynearson stadium, is used for all EMU teams and available for rentals to the community. The most current addition



EMU football players celebrate victory in the 1988 California Bowl, 30 to 27



George Gervin, Class of 1972

to facilities is the installation of a women's soccer/women's lacrosse field on West Campus.

GameAbove, a group of former EMU student-athletes and university graduates, has become a major benefactor of the university and the athletics department. The philanthropic group endeavors to improve university facilities and to assist students and faculty. One of their most recent contributions was raising money to rename the 8,000-seat Convocation Center built in 1997 on Eastern's West Campus as the George Gervin GameAbove Center. Gervin was recently named one of the top seventy-five players in NBA history. And in addition, a few months

later, GameAbove helped break ground on an \$8-million Golf Center at EMU's Eagle Crest Golf Course.

Finally, one of the most interesting issues facing the EMU athletics department during the past fifty years was the dropping of the Hurons nickname and adoption of Eagles in 1991. That decision, based on feedback from the State of Michigan about the sensitivity of using Native American nicknames for university athletic teams, created a great deal of anguish among the athletic family. The issue, even after more than thirty years, remains a hot button for many older alumni and friends of the university.

The EMU department of athletics is proud of its long history of excellence and looks forward to continuing its success into the future.

A Note on Sources

My connection in the athletics field in Ypsilanti and EMU from 1970–2012 are most of my material sources for my composition. I also received additional information and assistance from the outstanding current EMU Athletics Media Relations directors Greg Steiner and Alex Jewell. Photos provided by the EMU Archives.

About the Author

Jim Streeter has a long history of working in the athletics field in Ypsilanti and Eastern Michigan University. He was a former sports editor of *The Eastern Echo*, worked as a sportswriter at the *Ypsilanti Press*, and also served as the Associate Athletics Director for Media Relations at EMU from 1974 to 2012.

Hurons or Eagles? That Was the Question

BY KATHY CHAMBERLAIN

Questioning an Old Mascot

In October 1929, students Gretchen Borst and George Hanner won first place in a local contest to rename Michigan State Normal College's athletic teams. Their winning entry, the Hurons, edged out the second place Pioneers. It certainly sounded better than Normalites or sometimes "the men from Ypsi," as teams were then called. The name also gave a boost to Ypsilanti's elegant new Huron Hotel located on the corner of Washington and Pearl Streets where Hanner worked to help pay for his education. Neither student could have predicted that sixty years later their winning name would spark heated debates, protests, and lingering animosities.

In 1988, the Michigan Department of Civil Rights suggested that the use of Native American names and cultural symbols as team mascots promoted racial stereotypes. Such concern was not entirely new. Back in the 1940s, the National Congress of American Indians (NCAI) had begun to examine the impact between negative images and discrimination against Native Americans. The rise of Indigenous civil rights movements and the organization of the militant American Indian Movement, in 1968, pressured the NCAI to intensify its study and focus more narrowly on media and sports. The University of Oklahoma became the first school to retire its Little Red mascot, in 1970.

The dilemma reached Michigan in April 1988. Faced with the possibility of dropping the name Hurons, Eastern Michigan University appointed a review committee to consider the matter and make a recommendation. At first, the committee found only lukewarm support for change. Jim Harkema, EMU's then football coach, insisted the image portrayed Hurons as strong, tough, and "high-fiber people." Native American students wavered between "kind of an insult" and "kind of a compliment," although they considered the so-called Indian war whoops during games disrespectful.

Letters from across Michigan to the *Detroit Free Press* overwhelmingly opposed a

change. But by July 1989, a forum of students, alumni, university officials, and locals revealed greater differences of opinion than before, and these mounted over time. According to one camp, the Huron name exemplified tradition at EMU. Under no circumstances would they support a name or logo change. On the other side, a growing number of individuals on campus and in the community believed the Huron nickname cast Native Americans in a negative light, which they found particularly distressing in a university setting. They advocated for replacing the name.



Eastern Michigan University versus Toledo at Rynearson Stadium, 1989

Here Come the Eagles!

Ultimately, the EMU Board of Regents had the last word. They put together a fourteen-member committee to again study the issue. In February 1990, the committee announced that it did not find the nickname discriminatory. Its members suggested, however, that EMU make every effort to recruit more Native American students and expand library holdings on Indian history and culture. These recommendation did not end the debate. While some regents genuinely believed that most of the university community supported the Huron symbol, chairman John Burton saw rising opposition and convinced his fellow regents to reject the committee's report. Advocates on both sides dug in.

By September, there was still no decision on the horizon, so the regents asked university president Dr. William Shelton to weigh in on the debate. They gave him until their January 1991 meeting to reach a conclusion. Shelton came down in favor of retiring the Huron name and logo. The regents voted accordingly and launched the search for a new team name. From 315 entries submitted, the regents selected three finalists: Green Hornets, Express, and Eagles. At their May 22 meeting, they chose Eagles by a six-to-one vote.

But controversy dominated the meeting. Nearly two hundred people attended, and the regents permitted one hour of public comment. Chief Leroy Yellow Hawk spoke. His tribal affiliation lacked specifics, but he appeared in full headdress and regalia, and claimed to represent a coalition of Michigan and Ohio tribes. He spent more than a half hour criticizing the Huron logo and praising the change. Others at the meeting urged the regents to change their minds and even threatened cutting off monetary support for the university until the Huron name was restored.

Burton shocked fellow regents and attendees alike when he made a sudden reversal and moved to invalidate the Eagles vote. He proposed rejecting the other two finalist names as well. Why? “There comes a time in everyone’s life when you make mistakes,” he explained. As chaos threatened, Regent Richard Robb, who had chaired the logo committee, defended the vote. He noted that he was tired of the obscene phone calls and threats directed at him and his family. He wanted this to end. The vote held, and Eagles became the official nickname. Afterward, student government president, Geoffrey Rose sighed, “I’m just glad it’s over.”

Some Strong Disagreement

Sadly, Rose had spoken too soon.

A newly created Huron Restoration, Inc. (HRI) circulated petitions and crowded monthly board of regents’ meetings. Members sponsored letter-writing campaigns. They invited Leaford Bearskin, chief of the Oklahoma Wyandots, to visit Ypsilanti, discuss the matter with President Shelton, and address regents at their July meeting. The chief informed a gathering of alumni, students, and faculty that he did not object to the use of the Huron name. “I would be as proud as any chief could be to observe the Huron logo at the entrance to the university and in classrooms,” he declared. The regents canceled their July meeting, and Shelton informed Bearskin that the process was complete and the conclusion irrevocable.

The restoration group openly urged donors to withhold monetary gifts to the university. According to the *Ypsilanti Press*, alumni pledges fell from \$414,000 in 1990 to \$213,000 in 1991. Development Director Jack Slater blamed the recession, but some donors proudly announced otherwise. One couple put their annual donation in escrow “until EMU readopts the Hurons.” An individual changed his decision to donate altogether and declared “No Hurons, no money!” A corporate donor told the university to seek contributions from the ACLU or Michigan Civil Rights Commission, and added, “I no longer support EMU. I am a loyal Huron.”

As the university unveiled new uniforms and green Eagles T-shirts in time for the 1991 football season, HRI members told the regents at their August meeting “We are going to be your worst nightmare until this thing turns around.” The following year a renovated Rynearson Stadium welcomed football fans with an \$11 million facelift. It boosted seating capacity to 30,000. An upgraded scoreboard that could pull up and display players’ pictures at an instant’s notice stared from across the field. And a sign reading “Home of the Hurons” greeted fans in the south grandstands.

President Shelton also complained about harassment aimed at him and his family. Critics hounded him, he said, mostly shouting vulgar names and leaving threatening telephone messages. But at a December 21, 1991, away game in Auburn Hills, a vocal group focused its animosity at his son and daughter-in-law. Shelton declared “Your

battle is with me. If you think this is worth attacking my children, you're wrong."

In March 1992, a Republican state representative from Shelby Township introduced two bills in the state legislature. The first mandated that students and alumni vote on all team name and logo changes. It denied state appropriations to any university that refused to allow such votes and made the law retroactive five years. This law, if passed, would have nullified the EMU regents' 1991 decision. The second was a constitutional amendment to remove university governing boards and hand control over to the state legislature. Dave Trusty, president of EMU's Native American Student Organization at the time, commented, "This is the same old argument. . . I don't think it's going to pass." Neither bill was adopted.

The HRI Alumni Chapter then decided to produce clothing and promotional items bearing the old Huron logo. Their reasoning: "We thought the university didn't want that name." It met with a curt response from EMU's lawyer: "We originated it, and we still own it, even if we aren't using it." The argument proved a public relations mess for both sides.

An Educational Opportunity

Fortunately, the debate also proved educational. Some students and community residents wondered why they knew so little about Huron people and their history. Why were some members of the Huron nation offended while others were not? Many learned for the first time that the word "Huron" came from the Old French "*quelle hures*" and referred somewhat derisively to the bristly coiffures sported by most seventeenth-century Huron men. Clan based and matrilineal, Hurons were a confederacy of four groups rather than one monolithic people.

In 1649, Dutch traders armed the Hurons' most formidable enemy, the Iroquois (Haudenosaunee), and encouraged a surprise winter attack on villages generally located between Lakes Huron, Erie, and Simcoe, and Georgian Bay. The Dutch wanted an expanded role in the fur trade, and their greed destroyed what had once been the Huron nation. The confederacy scattered. Some remained in Canada. Others settled around the Detroit area, kept the Huron name, and maintained their French alliance. Many gravitated to northern Ohio, rejected the French, and reclaimed their original name of Wendat or Wyandot. Huron history proved a troubled one on the subject of their relations with white people.

Under the U.S. government, treaties written in 1807 and 1809 forced the Hurons to cede most of their Michigan lands. Ohio Wyandots were formally removed to Indian Territory in 1843. Those Ypsilanti residents who chose to read about Hurons and students who enrolled in new EMU classes on Indigenous peoples came to understand why some Native Americans today find team nicknames, logos, and war whoops disrespectful. Of course, other Native people interpret things differently and take pride in such symbols, as is their right.

The Controversy Continues

While animosity surrounding EMU's team nickname and logo has subsided over time, some individuals were still ready to stir the pot. A 2008 blog blamed poor football and basketball team performances on the name change. In 2012, university president Susan Martin quietly approved sewing the former Huron and Normalite logos onto newly designed marching band uniforms. Asked by Native American students to remove the logo, Martin countered that the images were hidden inside band jackets and would not in fact be seen. She insisted her goal was to unite the university and community after its long and contentious debate. Many more examples could be cited as well.

In 2023, there are alumni who still resent loss of the Huron name. But many students and newer faculty barely understand the debate. It is difficult to say whether Huron or Wyandot people hold a grudge or have long since accepted the decision. The controversy came at a time in our history when Americans began to understand that negative stereotypes could have an impact on legal issues and on how society has treated minorities. Some people argued that this went too far, but in most cases, they did not represent those on the receiving end. As one Native American student said, "Dropping the Huron symbol will help break down the distorted perception of natives and promote education on Indian life and culture." Let's hope that's true.



Huron and Normalite logos on 2012
band uniforms

A Note on Sources

The archives in Halle Library at Eastern Michigan University have two boxes of Huron Restoration, Inc., records that contain correspondence, newspaper clippings, and board of regents' files; there are also copies of the *Normal College News* and a full run of the *Eastern Echo*. The Ypsilanti Historical Society and Ypsilanti District Library have files of newspaper clippings regarding all aspects of this controversy, from the *Ann Arbor News*, *Ypsilanti Press*, *Detroit Free Press*, and others between 1988-2017. Charles E. Cleland, *Rites of Conquest: The History and Culture of Michigan's Native Americans* (University of Michigan Press, 1992) offers a solid study of Michigan Indian history. All images are from the EMU Archives.

About the Author

Ypsilanti resident Kathleen P. Chamberlain, Ph.D., is Professor Emerita of History at Eastern Michigan University. A historian of Native Americans and the U.S. West, she

is the author of several books including *Under Sacred Ground: A History of Navajo Oil, 1922–82*, *Victorio: Apache Warrior and Chief*, and *In the Shadow of Billy the Kid: Susan McSween and the Lincoln County War*.

A Guardian for Justice

The Women's Commission at EMU

BY MARY-ELIZABETH B. MURPHY

Equal Rights for All

Since its founding in Spring 1972, the President's Commission on Women at Eastern Michigan University (EMU) has served as an important guardian for justice, educating the EMU community about issues of sexism and gender equality. In its fifty-year history, the Women's Commission at EMU has largely mirrored broader trends in the conversation around women, gender, and sexuality, embracing change and evolving thinking around these matters.

When EMU was formed in 1849 as the Michigan State Normal School, it opened its doors to women students and students of color. As a school founded to train teachers, EMU was also a welcoming space for women faculty members and staff, a rarity for many institutions of higher learning. But despite EMU's rich legacy of educating women students and hiring women faculty, there was not an independent body specifically dedicated to supporting these populations until the founding of the Women's Commission in 1972.

Fifty years after the founding of the Women's Commission, the impact of this organization is palpable on campus. EMU is a university that is consistently ranked as very friendly to the LGBTQ+ community, boasts the only stand-alone master's program in Women's and Gender Studies in Michigan, has both a Women's Resource Center and a Title IX Office, and employs a significant number of women faculty members. Many of these initiatives were first proposed in the monthly meetings of the Women's Commission, making this organization a critical, if somewhat invisible, part of EMU's larger historical arc in the postwar era.

Inspired by Second-Wave Feminism

The President's Commission on Women at EMU was formed at a moment of polit-

ical and cultural significance for women in the United States. In 1972, second-wave feminism was in full force. Across the country, women were joining local chapters of the National Organization for Women (NOW), pressing for equal pay for equal work, advocating for reproductive freedom and women's health care, raising awareness about sexual violence, and working to banish sexism in the media, intimate partnerships, and the workplace.

The Women's Commission at EMU was a direct expression of this second-wave feminist sentiment. Since the late 1960s, the Faculty Women's Club at EMU had expressed concern that women faculty members experienced sexism in three areas: salary, rank, and teaching assignments. In March 1972, the Faculty Women's Executive Board wrote a proposal calling for a Women's Commission, and it was accepted by both EMU President Harold Sponberg and the Board of Regents.

Members of the Women's Executive Board crafted EMU's Women's Commission in anticipation of the impending federal legislation. That year, the United States Congress passed the Higher Education Amendments. Title IX of this law prohibited educational institutions that received federal funding from practicing sex discrimination. The Women's Commission at EMU thus served as the unofficial enforcement body for Title IX, making sure that the university banned sex discrimination.

By November 1972, EMU's Women's Commission was up and running, quickly becoming a permanent fixture on campus. President Sponberg appointed the first members, all women faculty at EMU. The commission was charged with "inquiring into the status of women in order to ensure fair treatment of all women at Eastern Michigan University." In the first few years, the Women's Commission held bimonthly meetings to address the interpersonal and systemic landscape of sexism that affected women faculty members, as well as issues of gender inequality at the whole university.

In the early years, the Women's Commission was frantically busy. Casting a wide net on issues of sexism, the commission established standing committees on continuing education, criminal assault, day care, scholarships, a Woman of the Year Award, and a Women's Studies curriculum. The Women's Commission was granted a permanent office in Goodison Hall, which served as a clearinghouse, enabling women faculty members to visit and report instances of sex discrimination, interacting with a supportive environment of like-minded women. The Women's Commission was staffed by student secretaries, was open ten hours a week, and maintained its own phone line. The commission even published its own newsletter, *Womenspeak*.

During the 1970s, the Women's Commission implemented many of the priorities of second-wave feminism, whether it was securing equal rights for women students and faculty, raising awareness about sexism throughout campus, or marshaling the knowledge of academic disciplines to create courses centered on women. The Women's Commission conducted a study into the need for childcare on campus, which ultimately

led to the opening of Children's Institute; petitioned the Board of Regents to disclose all salaries; approved of the university's affirmative action plan; championed the recruitment of more women into faculty positions and worked to de-stigmatize part-time jobs so that women could pursue employment while also fulfilling family obligations; and suggested a new grievance procedure after conducting a survey with the Job Classification and Promotion program.

The Women's Commission also worked to change the cultural landscape for women students on campus by sponsoring consciousness-raising seminars in two residence halls and petitioning the *Eastern Echo*, the campus newspaper, to disband its practice of running classified advertisements that limited employment opportunities to specifically women or men.

Within only a year of the founding of the Women's Commission, members established a subcommittee on developing a Women's Studies program. Initially the program consisted of cross-listed courses in Education, History, Literature, Psychology, and Sociology, but in the mid-1970s, it became a minor at EMU. Eastern Michigan was one of six universities in the state to participate in a National Humanities grant, enabling faculty members to design interdisciplinary courses in the new minor of Women's Studies.

An Expanded Mission

In 1977, five years after its founding, the Women's Commission recast its mission, broadening its focus from supporting mostly women faculty members to all women in the EMU community. The Women's Commission voted to include representation from more stakeholders across campus, including members of the clerical and administrative staff members and students.

As the commission expanded, so too did its areas of advocacy. In the 1970s, in accordance with Title IX, EMU began to equalize funding between men's and women's sports. The Women's Commission lobbied for the appointment of more women coaches, advocated for the safety of women athletes by pressing for locks on locker room doors, and hosted events with the newly formed Women's Basketball Team.

The Women's Commission took a special interest in supporting women who had dropped out of school to pursue marriage and motherhood. It worked to help them return to college. The commission held information sessions for these student populations and also critiqued the university's scholarship program, which required recipients to live in the dormitories, pointing out that women composed some of the population that were returning to school and lived off campus. And in coordination with the Michigan Council for the Humanities, they filmed a video aimed at returning women students.

Indeed, 1977 marked a banner year for women, both at EMU and across the country. In 1977, the United States celebrated the "Year of the Woman" and held a National Women's Conference in Houston, Texas, which was designed to generate national

support for the passage of the Equal Rights Amendment. In response, EMU President James Brickley declared March 1977 at EMU to be “Women’s Awareness Week,” which featured “Women of the Year Awards,” the Women’s Studies Association Meeting, a Women in Business conference, a film festival, and the opening of “Womanspace,” which was the proto-Women’s Center at EMU. Womanspace, also located in Goodison Hall, was modeled on a coffee house. It was designed to be a place where women students could study, eat lunch, and converse. It also hosted lectures and film screenings and had a small library and even an art gallery. Nominations for Women of the Year were popular and competitive, with the Women’s Commission receiving more than seventy-one names among faculty, staff, and students.

The enthusiasm that radiated out of the Women’s Commission likely reflected decades of pent-up frustration among women faculty, staff, and students. It was through the vehicle of the Women’s Commission that all of these major stakeholders could use this organization to improve their experiences at the university.

In the late 1970s and early 1980s, even though the national pace of feminism slowed across the country, the Women’s Commission continued to build on its achievements from the heady, early days of second-wave feminism. In this era, the commission focused on matters of sexual assault by hosting a film series on rape awareness, domestic violence, and child abuse. Members also sent a memo to all department heads about sexual harassment.

And the Women’s Commission established the Josephine Nevins Keal Awards to offer financial assistance to women faculty to pursue their research in support of career advancement. Because the Women’s Commission remained busy and essential, President William Shelton granted the chair releases from teaching as well as a personal computer, an innovative purchase for 1989.

Members of the Women’s Commission were also attentive to the organization’s legacy as well as the fate of the campus itself. The commission sent a letter to the administration, asking for a list of all of the buildings on campus that were scheduled to be demolished or those that were preserved. They also worked to include the Women’s Commission at EMU in the Women’s Hall of Fame.

The Work is Never Finished

By the 1990s, feminist activism took many different directions, including support for working parents, an awareness about empowering girls, and ongoing conversations about sexual harassment in the workplace. EMU’s Women’s Commission was at the forefront of these national trends. For example, in the 1990s, the Women’s Commission co-sponsored a panel on the nomination of Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas in 1991, and it held an informational session around the Family and Medical Leave Act of 1993.

Throughout the 1990s, the Women’s Commission continually supported program-

ming around Take Your Daughter to Work Day. When President Bill Clinton visited Eastern Michigan on a campaign stop in 1996, members of the Women's Commission were invited to a special reception at Arborland Mall.

Fifty years later, it is easy to see that some of the issues that the Women's Commission championed have received fresh interpretation, while others remain as relevant as before. With the prevailing doctrine that gender is a construct, the demand for events like Take Your Daughter to Work Day or legislation such as the Equal Rights Amendment have declined in popularity. As tolerance and awareness about LGBTQ+ populations has expanded, the Women's Commission has been a beacon of support, whether advocating for the opening of gender neutral restrooms on campus in 2017 or celebrating the distribution of menstrual products for all students in 2022. The Women's Commission also co-sponsored a Caregiver's Survey, documenting the impact of the pandemic on women faculty and staff.

Now that women compose the majority of students and faculty, it is imperative that the Women's Commission remain vigilant about sexual harassment and sexual assault. The rich, innovative, and sometimes surprising history of the Women's Commission in the first fifty years offers an excellent roadmap for envisioning the next half-century.

A Note on Sources

Information for this essay was located in the EMU Women's Commission Papers at the EMU Archives and taken from *EMU Today*. For historical overviews of second-wave feminism, see Ruth Rosen, *The World Split Open: How the Modern Women's Movement Changed America* (New York: Viking, 2000) and Ann Enke, *Finding the Movement: Sexuality, Contested Space, and Feminist Activism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007). For information on the Title IX Amendments, see Elizabeth Kaufer Busch and William E. Thro, *Title IX: The Transformation of Sex Discrimination in Education* (New York: Routledge, 2018). On feminism and feminist activism in the 1990s, see Lisa Levenstein, *They Didn't See Us Coming: The Hidden History of Feminism in the Nineties* (New York: Basic Books, 2020).

About the Author

Mary-Elizabeth B. Murphy is an Associate Professor of History and Chair of the Women's Commission at Eastern Michigan University. She teaches courses in U.S. Women's history, African American history, and the history of sexuality. She is the author of *Jim Crow Capital: Women and Black Freedom Struggles in Washington, D.C., 1920–48* and is working on a book about African American women and bus segregation before the Montgomery Bus Boycott.

Part Three:
Businesses

A One-of-a-Kind Visitor Experience

BY DEBBIE LOCKE-DANIEL

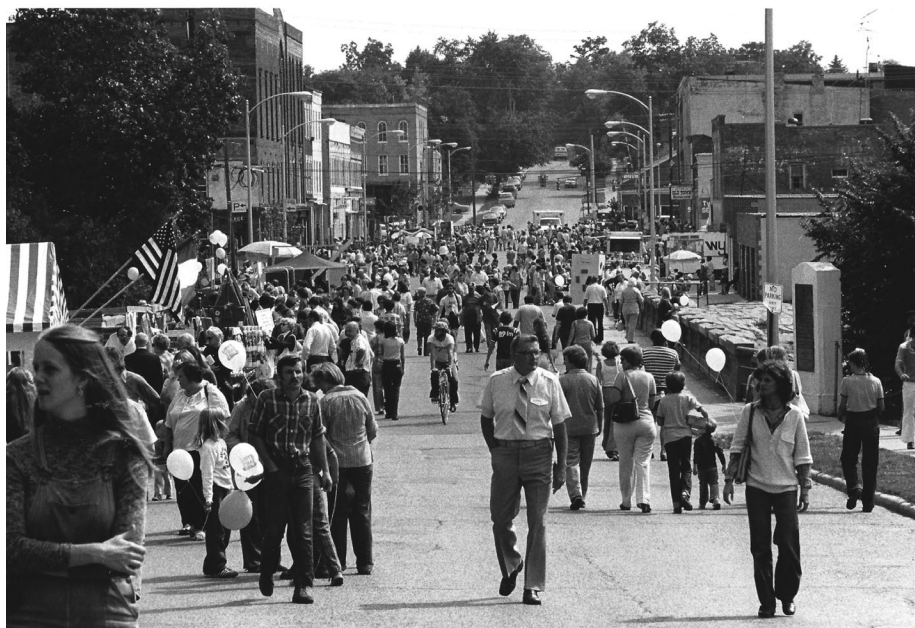
Convention and Visitors Bureau

In 1974, state representative Gary Owen was approached by a few local hoteliers and asked if he would facilitate a mandatory hotel-bed tax under Public Act 263. It would be collected by the county treasurer and then distributed to a Washtenaw County Convention and Visitors Bureau (CVB). It would serve as the marketing and sales arm for area hotels, motels, and other tourism venues, with oversight by the Washtenaw County Board of Commissioners. Representative Owen agreed but only if Ypsilanti had its own CVB. This resulted in the distribution of the tax monies as follows: based on population and location, 25% to the City of Ypsilanti and Ypsilanti Township and 75% to the rest of Washtenaw County.

To avoid duplication of effort it was unofficially decided that the Ann Arbor CVB would focus more on sales for the destination and the Ypsilanti CVB would promote and manage a variety of local annual events, with a smaller focus on sales.

For many years, the Ypsilanti CVB put on the popular Ypsilanti Heritage Festival. Events within the festival included the Flying Wallendas family trapeze act, historic encampments, a log rolling competition on the Huron River, a circus, numerous craft and food vendors, music and gambling tents, and nonprofit booths.

The Ypsilanti CVB both organized and promoted a Festival of Lights in Riverside Park, during the holidays; Gus Macker basketball tournaments; numerous car shows in Depot Town and Riverside Park, including the Orphan Car Show; the Frog Island Jazz Festival; the Volkswagen Show; the Camaro Superfest; the Ton Up Motorcycle and Music Festival; The Michigan Elvisfest; the Color Run; the Michigan Firehouse Museum's Fire Truck Muster; Thunder Over Michigan; and much more.



Ypsilanti Heritage Festival, 1979

A Change in Direction

Not long before I was hired as director of the Ypsilanti CVB, the board decided that the bureau would only become a marketing partner for local events, and it would no longer be responsible for their management. This followed the national model for destination marketing organizations. However, this meant that the long running Ypsilanti Heritage Festival had to form its own 501c3 and board of directors. This was accomplished under the oversight of local champion the late Nathalie Edmonds and friends.

Initially, both the Ann Arbor and Ypsilanti CVBs collected a 2% tax on each occupied-room night throughout Washtenaw County. The PA 263 legislation allowed up to a 5% tax if approved by the county's board of commissioners. For the destination of Ypsilanti to remain competitive, it was decided to increase the local tax to 5%. This was successfully lobbied by both the Ann Arbor and the Ypsilanti bureaus. With the recommendation of the Washtenaw County Hotel and Motel Association, the change was approved by the commissioners. The additional revenue allowed both CVBs to take their marketing efforts to a new level.

With an increased budget, the Ypsilanti CVB was able to accomplish some new initiatives. The additional marketing and sales staff included the installation of signage throughout both Ypsilanti and Ypsilanti Township. The bureau's staff successfully applied to become certified in all national best practices, as defined by Destinations

International in Washington D.C. The bureau attained this certification after an intensive year-long effort. Ypsilanti CVB chief operating officer Mary Zuccherro and I both became destination marketing executives through Destinations International.

In 2014, an exciting branding campaign was launched with a local company, Phire. Under their oversight and with the input of numerous local stakeholders, “YpsiReal” emerged and was fully integrated through the Ypsilanti community. It remains in place today. A “PURE Michigan” radio commercial campaign for Ypsilanti and surrounding communities was released as well.

An annual matching grant program called CTAP (Community Tourism Area Program) was also created for all Washtenaw County communities (Ypsilanti, Ypsilanti Township, Milan, Saline, Dexter, Chelsea, and Manchester), with the exception of Ann Arbor. This program offered each community an opportunity to receive up to a \$10,000 grant for a defined program that enhanced or grew their tourism product in their community. It included a detailed application and reporting process. All communities took advantage of it and many successful projects were completed! These included everything from new annual events to art installations to enhanced signage in their communities.

Through the years, the Ypsilanti CVB successfully partnered with the Ann Arbor CVB on numerous programs, marketing campaigns, and an annual visitors guide. These partnerships included one of the largest and most lucrative groups coming to our county which were the Plumbers and the Pipefitters annual training program held at Washtenaw Community College. They were followed by the both the IBEW (Electrical Union) and Ironworkers training programs. These three clients generated millions of dollars of economic impact each summer to the local economy and continue to do so.

In 2015, the Washtenaw Board of Commissioners voted to merge all county CVBs into one organization known as “Destination Ann Arbor.” This decision elicited mixed

emotions and some aggressive push back from the Ypsilanti CVB staff, board of directors, and many members of the Ypsilanti community. But the Ypsilanti Area Convention and Visitors Bureau had no choice but to disband. The local office has been retained and Destination Ann Arbor continues to promote the eastern part of the county.



Orphan Car Show Judge Ron Pinsoneault inspects a 1953 Hudson, 2016

Looking Back

I can only imagine that all those years ago in 1974, Representative Owens knew that Ypsilanti had such unique character and so many wonderful assets from Eastern Michigan University, great museums, unique events, historic architecture, Depot Town, downtown shops and restaurants to the beautiful Riverside and Frog Island Parks that he felt it warranted its own DMO or destination marketing organization. I totally agree and am proud to say that the highlight of my career was to end it with fifteen years of working with a rock star talented and dedicated staff, a supportive and talented board of directors and community champions that defied any I have ever known.

A Note on Sources

Facts, dates, and figures were drawn from both the memory and experience of the author, Debbie Locke-Daniel and her materials retained from her employment such as visitor guides and annual reports. Images are provided by the Ypsilanti Historical Society Archives.

About the Author

Debbie Locke-Daniel served as Executive Director of the Ypsilanti Area Convention and Visitors Bureau from 2000 until her retirement in 2015. In the Bureau's forty-one-year history, she was the longest serving director and its final director before it was merged with the Ann Arbor CVB.

A Century of Cars

Ypsilanti's Automotive History

BY DAVID NOVAK

Automobile companies, automotive part manufacturers, and automotive retail dealerships collectively defined much of Ypsilanti's economy during the twentieth century.

Michigan Crown Fender Company, 1914–16

If there is one building in Ypsilanti that is of utmost importance it is the Ypsilanti Automotive Heritage Museum (YAHM) on the corner of North River and East Cross streets. The oldest portion of the building dates to the late 1860s. Ford Motor Company, in the early years, relied on small “outside” companies to provide various parts and send them to Ford so he could assemble his automobiles and trucks. One of those providers, Michigan Crown Fender, was incorporated in 1914 and occupied a portion of what is now YAHM. The company produced fenders, hoods, running boards and other sheet metal products. The company provided similar products to other automobile and motor truck manufacturers. By 1916, Ford had begun stamping their own sheet metal products and Crown Fender moved out of the building to another facility on Lowell at North Huron and renamed the company United Stove Company.

Commerce Motor Car Company, 1911–26

In 1911, the Commerce Motor Car Company began operations at its plant near Parsons and South River Street. The name of the company is a bit misleading as the company built trucks. The Ypsilanti plant produced four bus chassis and several truck models. Early in 1927, Relay Motors of Wabash, Indiana, bought Commerce and removed all the equipment. By 1929, there were only sixteen Commerce vehicles registered countrywide.

Ace Automobiles, 1919–22

In 1919, Frank Earnest of Seattle, Washington, founded the Apex Motor Car Company

to manufacturer the Ace automobile. Realizing that the Detroit area was the place to be, Earnest found a secure piece of land in Ypsilanti on South River Street. Automobiles were assembled in a one-story wood and stucco building, with final assembly and inspection under a tent. Nearly all the 256 vehicles produced were sent to Seattle for Earnest's dealership. Ace automobile production ended with the 1922 model year, and the company was sold to the American Motor Truck Company of Newark, Ohio.

Saxon Motor Company, 1922

The Saxon Motor Company was founded in Detroit during 1913. The company did well, selling a car that cost less \$500 to compete with the Model T. In 1917, in an effort to expand, Saxon ordered a huge inventory of materials and started construction of a new factory in Detroit. With wartime material shortages, production of cars fell, and the company found itself short of cash. The new factory was sold to General Motors and Saxon Motor Company looked for a new home.

Local businessmen induced Saxon to move into the recently vacated Ace plant. Saxon officials said the choice of Ypsilanti was evidence of the natural assets Ypsilanti had as an industrial city. The move was confirmed on March 25, 1922, and production began on April 3. However, bad market conditions hindered efforts to raise capital. The company went bankrupt and production of the Saxon automobile ended in the fall of 1922.

Ford Motor Company, 1932–2008

During the 1920s, Henry Ford built hydro powered small factories in small southeastern Michigan towns. These were known as Ford's Village Industries. Ypsilanti's Village Industry was established in 1932 with 850 workers and was powered by a Huron River dam on the new Ford Lake. It specialized in manufacturing generators and starters, and it came to be known as the Generator Plant. During World War II, the plant built large generators and starters for airplanes, armored cars, and tanks. After World War II and the death of Henry Ford, the company slowly closed many of the Village Industries and transferred their manufacturing to the Ypsilanti plant. Ypsilanti's Ford plant manufactured many automotive parts and employed 4,089 hourly and 450 salaried workers. The plant closed in 2008 when Ford Motor Company started to outsource part manufacturing.

Motor State Products, 1930–70

In 1910, Alfred Langer arrived in New York City from Germany, and the next year, he opened Golde Patent Manufacturing Company to manufacture of convertible top frames. Cliff Dickey, retired Gene Butman sales manager, remembers conversations with Langer family members. They said:

Alfred went to Dearborn to visit Henry Ford. He saw Henry in the parking lot and told him about his convertible top frame. Henry invited him back to his office where the frame was discussed. Henry was intrigued enough to ask for twelve frames. After testing the frames, Mr. Ford agreed to purchase Langer's frames for Ford roadsters which were the convertibles of the time.

Golde Patent moved to Ypsilanti to be closer to the automobile industry. In 1930, they constructed a large manufacturing facility at South River and Parsons. Alfred Langer was president, and August "Gus" Keller was invited from Germany to be Vice-President of Engineering and Design. The management team continued to 1938 when the name was changed to Motor State Products.

"Motor State built tops for the largest percentage of the car industry," Ypsilanti's automotive historian Jack Miller once said. "Other companies built tops and paid a \$5 patent fee per top to Motor State. The Motor State convertible top became the standard for the industry."

Motor State employees went on to invent the hydraulic cylinder that made convertible tops automatic. They also designed and manufactured power window and power seat mechanisms.

Detroit Harvester took over Motor State in 1947. As a corporate division, the Motor State Products name continued. By 1970, most auto companies stopped manufacturing convertibles which resulted in the closing of the Ypsilanti factory.

Ypsilanti Industries, 1946–47



Paul Chapman Pontiac-Cadillac, 15 East Michigan, c. 1956

Joseph Sesi left his home in Mesopotamia and arrived in America in 1923. He came to Detroit where a handful of fellow countrymen had settled and where he began working as a grocery store delivery boy. In the early 1930s, Sesi opened a grocery store in Detroit's Boston Edison neighborhood. It was there that Joe met Henry Ford I, the Fisher Brothers, and other prominent Boston Edison Neighborhood residents. After World War II, Henry Ford I and Ford family members were so impressed with Sesi's work ethic and dedication that they offered him an opportunity to manufacture auto parts. Alan Chapel, husband of Mrs. Ford's niece, partnered with Sesi, and the two men founded Ypsilanti Industries in 1946. Chapel was president and Sesi was vice president, and the two used a vacated building at 20 East Michigan. The two had a contract from Ford to manufacture fifty percent of the roller bearings and synchronizer rings for manual transmissions that Ford needed to start post war auto manufacturing. Borg Warner had a contract for the other fifty percent, although when Borg Warner went on strike, Sesi and Chapel worked twenty-four hours a day to keep production going.

As the demand for cars increased, Ford Motor Company decided to separate the sale of Lincolns and Mercurys from Ford dealerships. On March 14, 1947, Sesi and Chapel opened one of the original twenty-seven Lincoln Mercury dealerships at 20 East Michigan Avenue. In 1965, Sesi Lincoln Mercury moved to Ypsilanti Township. The *Ypsilanti Press* then took over the building ending the sale of new cars at 20 East Michigan.

Tucker, 1948

Without a doubt, the most notable automobile with roots in Ypsilanti is the Tucker. Preston Tucker loved automobiles, and from a young age, he was infatuated with things that went fast. With Henry Ford, he put several race cars into Indianapolis 500 races. After World War II, the public was ready for new car designs, but the Big Three were



Preston Tucker's home at 110 North Park Street and his Tucker 48

slow in transitioning to peacetime production. This opened the door for small automotive companies. Tucker had plans for a new automobile with unique features including a flat-six rear air cooled engine, disc brakes, four-wheel independent suspension, fuel injection, seat belts, and a padded dashboard. His featured trademark was a center turning headlight

that turned with the steering wheel to light the way around corners. Many of these features showed up later on vehicles manufactured by the major automobile companies.

By 1948, Tucker had gathered his team and produced a prototype at a facility in Chicago. Only fifty-one cars were made before the company was forced to declare bankruptcy and cease operations in 1949. The bankruptcy was blamed on negative publicity initiated by news media, a Securities and Exchange Commission investigation, and a heavily publicized stock fraud case. Even though he was found to not be guilty of stock fraud, the damage was done. Preston lived with his in-laws at 110 North Park and did much of his early design work in a barn behind 110 North Park. The 1988 movie *Tucker: The Man and His Dream* is based on the drama surrounding the car's production.

Kaiser-Frazer, 1947–53

In 1947, Kaiser-Frazer Corporation moved into the old Willow Run plant. The corporation was a partnership between industrialist Henry J. Kaiser and automobile executive Joseph W. Frazer. Kaiser had no automotive marketing experience, but had held various positions at Packard, GM, Chrysler, Willys-Overland, and Graham-Paige. In 1946, Kaiser-Frazer displayed prototypes of two new cars in New York. Because of production costs and development time issues, the 1947 model year Kaiser and Frazer sedans shared their bodies and powertrains.

The market for Kaiser-Frazer products slowed in 1949 due to new designs from the Big Three. Kaiser pushed for more production, creating an oversupply of cars that took until mid-1950 to sell. Kaiser and Frazer had repeated disagreements on how aggressive production should be, until Frazer left the company in 1951. The Frazer nameplate was dropped after a short 10,000 unit production run in 1951. Frazer was replaced by Henry's son, Edgar F. Kaiser.

The '54 Frazer was the first postwar production car to offer a supercharger. A small economy car called the Henry J was introduced in 1950. The Darrin, the first fiberglass sports car in the United States, beat the Corvette to market in 1954. In 1953, Kaiser bought the ailing Willys-Overland company and merged the companies into the Kaiser-Willys Corporation. The decision was then made to exit the passenger car market at the end of the 1953 model year. Some 739,000 cars were produced at the Willow Run facility during the company's short stay.

General Motors acquired the Willow Run facility later in 1953 and built automatic transmissions at the plant until 2009 when the facility closed as part of GM's bankruptcy.

Ypsilanti Automotive Heritage Museum, 1995-present

The Ypsilanti Automotive Heritage Museum sits on the southeast corner of East Cross and North River. The automotive history of the building started in 1917 as a Dodge dealership, became a Willys-Overland dealership in 1927, and finally a Hudson deal-



Ypsilanti Ford Plant, c. 1970

ership owned by Alex Longnecker and Carl Miller in 1933, and Miller alone after 1945. Miller sold new Hudsons until 1958 when the production of the care ended after forty-nine years.

Miller Motors passed from Carl to son Jack who sold used Hudsons and other brands. Jack bought up Hudson parts from closed dealerships and became the source of Hudson parts for Hudson enthusiasts all over the world.

In 1995, Jack Miller had lunch with Peter Fletcher (owner of Ypsilanti Credit Bureau) and Skip Ungrodt (owner of Ideations, a gift shop wholesaler) at the Sidetrack Bar and Grill. The two purchased the Hudson dealership and 112 East Cross to form the Ypsilanti Automotive Heritage Museum. Jack Miller was hired as curator and served as board president of the nonprofit museum until he retired in 2015. In 1999, Skip and Peter united 112 East Cross with the Hudson dealership by funding the construction of a building between them at 106 East Cross.

The original Hudson dealership became the National Hudson Motor Car Museum in 2015. The Ypsilanti Automotive Heritage Museum features Kaiser-Frazer, Chevrolet Corvair, Tucker, and General Motors, all with Ypsilanti connections.

New Car Dealerships

During most of the twentieth century, when Washtenaw County residents were in the market for a new car, they went to Ypsilanti. All of the cars produced by Ford, General Motors, Chrysler, independent manufacturers, tractors, trucks, and many foreign manufacturers were sold in new car dealerships on Michigan Avenue between Huron Street and Prospect.

A Note on Sources

David had a life-long interest in Ypsilanti's automotive history. He used his memory, books, and Ypsilanti Automotive Heritage Museum's resources to write this article. All images are from the Ypsilanti Historical Society Archives.

About the Author

David Novak was a Ypsilanti Automotive Heritage Museum board member. He passed away in 2022 and Bill Nickels helped to complete this essay.

Willow Run

80+ Years of Contributions

BY BARRY LEVINE

By Ypsilanti's sesquicentennial in 1973, Willow Run had made an enormous impact on local communities, Michigan, and the United States. Tens of thousands of people had worked at the many aviation and automotive enterprises that comprise Willow Run (the name comes from a small area stream).

The Origins of Willow Run

To fully understand Willow Run's post-1973 contributions, some background on its origins is needed. Beginning in 1941, Ford Motor Company built and operated "The Bomber Plant": a 3.5-million-square-foot facility that produced 8,685 Consolidated B-24 Liberator bombers. These aircraft, serving in a wide range of roles, were essential to the Allied war effort against the Axis in World War II.

After hostilities concluded, the plant was taken over by Kaiser-Frazer Automotive, a consolidation of companies operated by auto manufacturer Joseph Frazer and ship builder Henry Kaiser. Kaiser-Frazer produced over 700,000 automobiles as well as 71 Fairchild C-119 "Flying Boxcar" aircraft (some of which saw service in Vietnam) before running into financial difficulties.

General Motors (GM) leased and then purchased the plant from Kaiser-Frazer after its Livonia transmission plant was destroyed in an August 1953 fire. GM completed an industrial miracle by converting the plant from automobile to transmission production in twelve weeks. GM's facility became known by names such as "Hydra-matic" (the transmission's marketing name) and was running full tilt in 1973. Over the years, it expanded to about five million square feet.

GM had another manufacturing plant on site: Willow Run Assembly (WRA). Initially a Ford storage facility, GM used the space to produce 1.4 million Chevrolet Corvairs. When the Corvair was discontinued in 1969, GM turned to producing other



Willow Run Assembly produced seven million cars, including the Chevrolet Corvair.

[Photo courtesy of the author]

vehicles at WRA.

For the first thirty years, Willow Run had a tremendous history. Over the next fifty years, many changes were to come.

Auto Manufacturing

At WRA, car production continued after the Corvair era. Vehicles produced included the Chevrolet Nova, Buick Skylark, and Pontiac GTO.

Working conditions on the line in both plants were challenging: neither was air conditioned. The production line was unrelenting, with 6,000 WRA workers producing 1,000 cars a day in 1973. There was a long list of hazards for the men and women on the line such as working with power equipment, deafening noise, and exposure to toxic fumes from paints and solvents.

Labor relations could be challenging. In September 1970, a sixty-seven-day national GM strike began that halted production at both of GM's Willow Run facilities. At one point, salaried workers and supervisors were barricaded in their offices by strikers. Issues involved included pensions, health care costs for retirees, and wages. Strike pay was modest at about \$30-\$40 per week.

The 1973 United Auto Workers (UAW) contract was the first such contract designed to protect the health and safety of UAW members. For the first time, professional staff members were designated to sit on the union-company national health

and safety committees.

WRA closed in 1993, with production shifting to Arlington, Texas. The last model produced was Chevrolet's Caprice with total production from the early truck days going forward to 1993 of about seven million vehicles.

Both plants made enormous contributions to the local economy in terms of jobs, property taxes, and charitable work by employees. Recriminations and litigation followed between GM and Ypsilanti officials once the closure was announced as Ypsilanti provided significant tax benefits to GM for jobs that no longer existed. The courts ultimately ruled in favor of GM and the plant was closed.

At all automotive manufacturing plants, a combination of factors such as overseas competition and the mechanization of manual processes led to shrinking employment. Although GM continued making sizeable investment in the transmission plant (which operated under names such as GM Powertrain and Ypsilanti Transmission Operations), the recession and then GM's 2009 bankruptcy led to the plant's closure in 2010, ending some 1,400 jobs.

Altogether, GM's Willow produced over 82 million transmissions. The last one off the line was signed by employees on hand that day.

Willow Run Airport

Aviation continued to loom large at Willow Run after B-24 manufacturing stopped in 1945. In the late 1950s, Willow Run became the Detroit area's primary commercial airport, succeeding City Airport. However, the airlines began moving passenger service to Metropolitan Airport, and June 1966 saw the last Willow Run commercial flight, a United Airlines departure for Chicago.

Aviation education was part of the landscape at Willow Run. The Detroit Institute of Aeronautics (DIA) was founded at Willow Run by Lee Koepke and Norm Ellickson in 1968. The school was designed to teach students various aspects of aviation maintenance, leading to qualifying for an Airframe & Powerplant license. DIA was bought by MIAT College in 1990 and is now headquartered in nearby Canton.

Aviation always poses risks. While there have been several fatal airplane crashes at Willow Run, a tragedy was avoided when a charter flight with 110 passengers (including the University of Michigan basketball team) and six crew aboard crashed on takeoff at Willow Run in March 2017. The plane experienced mechanical issues while taking off in high winds; no one was seriously injured; the crew (who were commended for their actions) aborted the takeoff and skidded across a local road.

Willow Run has had a long line of distinguished visitors. President Franklin Roosevelt visited Willow Run in 1942 to inspect the Bomber Plant. Many more have since followed. Then-Senator John Kennedy in October 1960 arrived at Willow Run on his way to the University of Michigan, where the remarks he made in front of the Michi-

gan Union set the stage for creating the Peace Corps. More recently, Presidents Barack Obama (in 2014) and Donald Trump (in 2017) landed at Willow Run on their way to events here in Michigan.

Air Freight

After passenger flights ended, Willow Run continued to be used by many air freight operators. Brothers Lloyd, Duane, Howard, and Elroy Zantop from Jackson formed Zantop Flying Service and began to haul freight for GM, and then Ford and Chrysler. Remade into Zantop International

Airlines (ZIA) in 1972, the company used Willow Run as the hub in a “hub-and-spoke” system for routing cargo.

ZIA was once one of the world’s largest cargo airlines, carrying at times a million pounds of freight a night. A company tag line was “Zantop: The Name That Carries a Lot of Weight.” ZIA, however, found the competitive environment increasingly difficult to navigate and ceased operations in 2005.

Numerous other freight haulers at Willow Run, such as Rosenbalm Aviation, Transcontinental Airlines, and Karon Gillespie, no longer exist. The primary freight haulers now operating at Willow Run are USA Jet (part of the Active Aero Group) and Kalitta Air.

USA Jet’s founding goes back to Robert Phelps, who was a Metro Airport mechanic early in his career, earning \$2 per hour. Phelps opened Active Aero in 1979 at Willow

Run, and he operated USA Jet until the 1990s when he sold his holdings.

Employees from the 1980s recall that USA Jet personnel did just about everything on a typical night: taking customer calls, fueling planes, pulling flight manifests and weather reports for pilots, and loading cargo. Hours were irregular; night and weekend work were routine. Flights might be scheduled with little notice, and pilots were expected to be ready to fly



Zantop International would often fly a million pounds of freight a night. [Torsten Maiwald, Wikimedia Commons]

at twenty-five minutes of notice. Some pilots slept at Willow Run and used shower facilities at the fire house.

Kalitta Air was founded by Conrad Kalitta who grew up in Mt. Clemens and began his air freight career flying parts for Ford in a twin-engine Cessna. From this modest

beginning, Kalitta grew into American International Airways (AIA), and was once one of the world's twenty-five largest airlines. After a merger with another freight operator, Kalitta resigned from AIA to run an airline leasing business. AIA went out of business with operations resuming as Kalitta Air in 2000.

In 2003, Kalitta Air was awarded a Certificate of Appreciation for supporting U.S. military efforts in Iraq. In 2020, Kalitta Air flew evacuating US citizens home from Wuhan, China, in a specially converted aircraft designed to limit further spread of the coronavirus.

While the number of air freight companies has decreased, Willow Run remains a major air freight airport and an integral part of the international supply chain. About 200 million pounds of freight pass through it annually. Over the last few years, numerous infrastructure improvements have been and will continue to be made at the complex.

Maintaining the Heritage

Also on the complex is the Yankee Air Museum, which was founded in 1981. The original museum, housed in a WWII hangar, was destroyed in a 2004 fire. The museum now has a fleet of five flyable aircraft, numerous displays of static aircraft, and has completed or is working on numerous aircraft restoration and preservation projects.

The Yankee Air Museum purchased 144,000 square feet of the Bomber Plant/Hydra-Matic in 2014 and envisioned that structure as the museum's future home (the remainder of the plant was razed). Fundraising proved to be extraordinarily challenging; the facility is now used for aircraft preservation and storage.

The museum has built a new hangar (opened in 2022), known as the Roush Aeronautics Center which houses its flyable aircraft. The Roush Center has a nearby display of a Boeing B-52D Stratofortress, one of the museum's aircraft preservation projects. Two members of the preservation team serviced this aircraft 50+ years ago when they were stationed at U-Tapao Royal Thai Navy Airfield during the Vietnam war. This aircraft is estimated to have flown 600 missions during the Vietnam war.

The museum has completed several aircraft restoration projects, including a nine-year effort on a Boeing B-17G Flying Fortress nicknamed *Yankee Lady*. The late Norm Ellickson led this effort; Ellickson had been one of the leading B-17 experts anywhere with a storehouse of knowledge and expertise.

Also, the Yankee Air Museum, along with the support of the Wayne County Airport Authority, produces an annual air show, *Thunder Over Michigan*, a summertime staple in Michigan, at Willow Run. Museum staff manages the event and supplies about 500 volunteers annually to support *Thunder*.

American Center for Mobility

The American Center for Mobility (ACM) is a collaboration of government, academic, and industry partners that was founded in 2017 to support research and development



Blue Angels at Thunder Over Michigan, July 2022. [Courtesy of Lance Kuhn]

work on new automotive technologies such as self-driving and self-parking vehicles. Specially designed roads and tunnels were built for vehicle testing. Much of ACM's grounds is on the site of what had been the Ford Bomber Plant. In this way, the spirit of innovation continues with ACM.

Conclusion

Willow Run has been a center of Michigan's aviation and automotive history and innovation from the early days of World War II, through to the present, and will be into the future. The hard work and dedication of the men and women who have come to work here is without question. While individual organizations come and go, Willow Run continues to reflect larger societal issues, incorporate new technologies, and will remain an integral part of the Ypsilanti community for years to come.

A Note on Sources

Information for this article comes from the archives of Yankee Air Museum, the Ypsilanti Historical Society, the Benson Ford Research Center, and the University of Michigan's Bentley Library. Interviews were also conducted with Jim Redick Jr, Duane Zantop, Eva McGuire, Carol Anderson, Randy Hotton, and Kevin Walsh. Other sources include the obituaries of Lee Koepke and Norm Ellickson, UAW safety reports (held at Wayne

State University), and Wayne County Airport Authority Master Plan. Published sources include *Arsenal of Democracy: FDR, Detroit, and an Epic Quest to Arm an America at War* by A. J. Baime (Houghton Mifflin, 2014), *Framed!: Labor and the Corporate Media* by Christopher R. Martin (Cornell UP, 2003), *The Reckoning* by David Halberstam (Morrow, 1986), and *Zantop: The Name That Carries a Lot of Weight* (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tHKgEaz9_sg&t=6s). Various newspapers were consulted including *Hillsdale Daily News* and *The New York Times*.

About the Author

Barry Levine volunteers at the Yankee Air Museum, has published two aviation-themed books, and has written for Michigan History, Aviation History, and other publications.

The Ypsilanti Thrift Shop's Early History

BY NANCY HAMILTON

A Community in Need

When World War II broke out in Europe in September 1939, the United States was in an isolationist mood. But President Franklin Roosevelt could read the tea leaves, and he wanted to prepare the country for what he believed was an inevitable war. With the importance of airpower in mind, he tapped the Ford Motor Company to begin production of the B-24 bomber. The site chosen was Willow Run, named after the small creek, that ran through the huge tract of land Henry Ford owned near Ypsilanti.

Construction of the plant began in 1941, and by 1942, it was turning out aircraft. Workers arrived from all over the country. Many of those newcomers came with few possessions, and they were unprepared for Michigan winters.

In April 1942, a group of Ypsilanti women, determined to do what they could to aid in the war effort, met at a local hotel for the purpose of establishing what was to become the Ypsilanti Thrift Shop Association. They adopted by-laws with a goal of founding “an independent organization for the purpose of conducting a permanent rummage sale, the proceeds from which, over and above operating expenses, shall be used for charity.” To this day, this remains the operating principle of the Ypsilanti Thrift Shop.

Finding a Home

The store initially occupied a tin shop in Depot Town, at 35 Cross Street. This was working out well until the female volunteers began noticing that the owner of the building and his friends were hanging around playing cards and staring at them as they worked. This scrutiny didn't sit well with the ladies, so they decided to relocate.

The shop now moved to 510 West Cross Street, but that was too far from the business district to attract customers. Next, they packed up and moved to the old bus station, at 2 South Adams Street, which was much more conducive to business success. The shop

relocated a few more times, until they finally bought their own building, putting an end to renting and its attendant problems.

A former warehouse at 14 South Washington Street became the Thrift Shop Association's new home in 1974. The ladies paid \$16,000 to Atwood McAndrew, who owned the building. His wife, Mary, suggested and facilitated the sale. (I learned this from the Atwood's son when he brought in several suits and coats to donate.)

The building had been used strictly for storage, and it wasn't ready for occupancy. It had no heat or running water, no paint or obvious retail space, no permanent interior walls, and no carpeting. A tremendous amount of work was going to be needed to make the place habitable. Paint, electrical materials, a gas furnace, and ductwork were donated, and much of the work was done by volunteers and their husbands.

On April 2, 1974, the Ypsilanti Thrift Shop opened for business with a celebratory tea and a ceremony attended by volunteers, community members, and well-wishers. Helen Milliken, wife of then-governor William Milliken, was guest of honor, and she cut the ceremonial ribbon.



Ypsilanti Thrift Shop, 14 South Washington

Good Working Order

Over the years, the Ypsilanti Thrift Shop has had some expensive maintenance problems. By 2016, the hundred-year-old roof was leaking, causing damage to wood and masonry. Under President June Gordon, we undertook an extensive campaign to raise the money

for a new roof and interior repairs. The campaign was supported by many local businesses and benefactors, and the work was completed.

In 2020, at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, we installed an ionizer to remove dust particles as well as viruses from the air. In the summer, the air conditioner broke down and had to be replaced. Also in that summer, a lift was installed to carry items between the attic and the main floor, so volunteers would no longer have to navigate the twenty scary stairs. The following winter, the furnace died.

The expenses involved in these necessary repairs and improvements would have been crippling if it hadn't been for the foresight and wisdom of the board of directors, who had prudently set aside a goodly sum of money in an emergency fund. These updates were carried out without detracting from our mission of supporting local charities.

A wonderful thing happened, in 2021, when we received word of a \$250,000 bequest from late community member Joe Lawrence in honor of his mother, Christine S. Lawrence, who had been an active Thrift Shop volunteer. We invested the money and will use only the interest that accrues for "the preservation, maintenance and refurbishment" of our building. Our first expenditure from the endowment allowed us to paint the shop's front room. Painting our other rooms will proceed as our interest accumulates.

Serving Those in Need

For the first several years of its existence, the Thrift Shop board of directors met monthly, typically at McKenny Hall on the Eastern Michigan University campus. Minutes were kept in small spiral notebooks, which are preserved at the University of Michigan's Bentley Historical Library.

The first board meeting was held on May 7, 1942, presided over by Mrs. Daniel Quirk, wife of the president of the First National Bank of Ypsilanti. Committee chairs reported the names of their members and Mrs. Quirk read summaries of the duties of each committee. The board decided not to sell on commission. If they had, donors would have received a portion of each sale.

By June, they were already discussing the need for a better location, dues were set at \$1 per year for all volunteers, and they talked about being open in the evenings. The need for furniture and dishes was apparent, because workers at the bomber plant were arriving in town with nothing. There was \$295.22 in the treasury and membership in the Thrift Shop Association was closed with eighty-two members even though there was a waiting list of prospective members eager to join.

Looking through the minutes, we learn about the needy cases that benefited from the Thrift Shop's generosity. For example, in July 1942, "refractions" (a.k.a., eye exams and glasses) for children, costing \$125, were paid for. The Thrift Shop sometimes even financed children's tonsillectomies. That August, \$11 was enough to cover a boy's two-week stay at the Cedar Lake Camp. Later that year, \$25 financed Red Cross kits and

another \$25 a blood donor program. A boy received \$25 to go to Starr Commonwealth, a nearby organization that “aims to heal trauma and build resilience in all children,” and an additional \$25 paid for clothes and other needed articles. In November 1942, five children received money for eye exams and glasses.

In other years, the Thrift Shop paid to furnish a room at Beyer Hospital for parents visiting their sick children, and they donated funds for the hospital care of “an indigent child.” Money was provided for the room and board of a fifteen-year-old girl whose mother was having an operation. The shop was called on most frequently to help children who needed glasses and for donations to local charities such as the Carver Community Center, Gilbert House, and Beyer Hospital. From the start, the Social Services Committee received monthly sums to deal with needy cases.

The annual meeting held in January 1943 reported on the Thrift Shop's activities from May to December 1942. The shop had earned \$1620.03 in daily sales and \$52 in dues (apparently, not everyone paid up). New board members were chosen by drawing names from a hat!

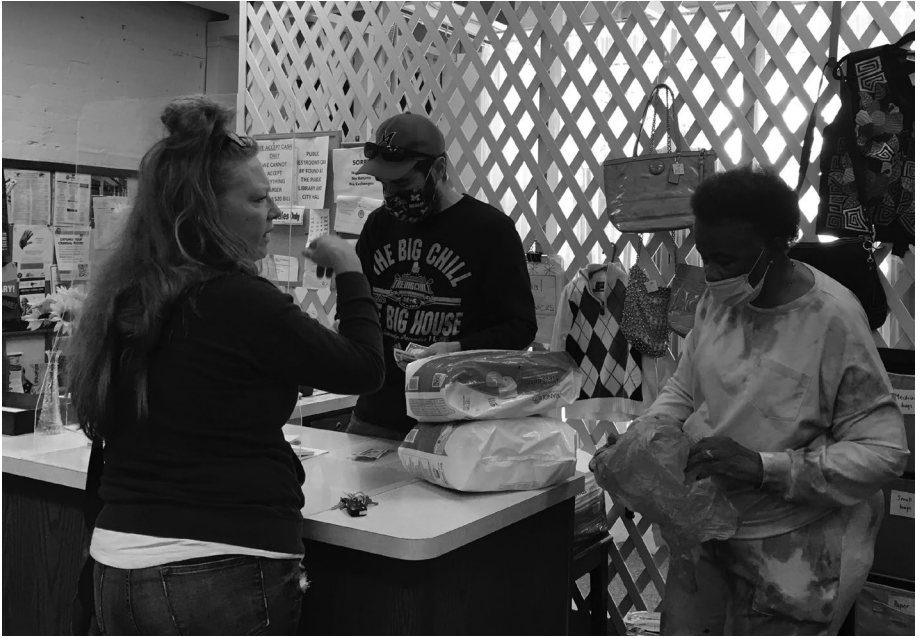
In 1945, the Thrift Shop did some very interesting fund-raising. Mrs. Cleary wrote to Hedda Hopper, the famous Hollywood gossip columnist, telling her about the shop and asking for one of her well-known hats, to be used for a special project. Mrs. Hopper wrote back, saying the hat was on its way! The minutes fail to report on the eventual fate of the hat.

Reading the minutes of board meetings for the first fifteen years or so of the Thrift Shop's existence, it is clear they had difficulty collecting enough donations. People didn't have the surplus money many of us have today. To supply the need for more saleable items, Mrs. Quirk held a “Bundle tea,” which became an annual event for several years. The tea was held at the Quirk mansion, at 304 North Huron Street. Elegant tea sandwiches and petit fours were served, along with tea and coffee. The entrance fee was a bundle of saleable clothing for the shop. According to the newspaper clipping, this event was hugely popular.

The Thrift Shop Today

Today, the Ypsilanti Thrift Shop has a Board of Directors, which is made up of a president, vice president, treasurer, disbursing treasurer, recording secretary, and corresponding secretary. In addition, there are ten committee chairs who oversee and carry out the tasks that need to be done in the day to day running of the shop. These are scheduling, membership, social service, housekeeping, pricing/merchandising, building, donations, telephone/email, publicity, and historian. The board meets six times a year. During the pandemic, meetings were held via Zoom. With email and phone calls, we were able to consult on issues that cropped up between meetings, such as emergency closures.

We currently have around sixty active members. Volunteers usually work one three-



Kyle Sutherland and Evelyn Miller assist a customer

and-a-half-hour shift per month. Since the start of the pandemic, we've had to cut back on the number of hours we're open, but we are open Monday to Saturday for three to six hours per day, depending on the day of the week.

Volunteers receive an orientation where they're shown around the shop, so they know what we have to sell and where everything is. They learn our procedures for selling and what to do with the cash and how to handle the vouchers.

We receive vouchers from several charitable organizations that serve the Ypsilanti community. These are issued by social workers on behalf of their clients. Vouchers entitle the recipient to select goods from the shop for free, usually in the amount of \$15 per person in the household.

The list of good works and charitable donations made by the Thrift Shop is much longer than this paper can report. Through the years the shop has helped fill the needs of those unprovided for by other agencies and organizations, stepping in to help where help was badly needed. We have a legacy to be proud of.

A Note on Sources

Information for this essay comes from Ypsilanti Thrift Shop records and the author's personal experiences. The images were provided by the author.

About the Author

Nancy Hamilton has been president of the Ypsilanti Thrift Shop since January 2021. She has been an active member since 2011, and she previously served on the board of directors as vice president and corresponding secretary.

The Transformation of Ypsilanti

A View from Downtown

BY MIKE KABAT

When I Arrived

In 1976, I had the opportunity to purchase Haab's Restaurant from the Haab brothers, which, by then, had served residents of southeast Michigan for forty-two years. At the time, Downtown Ypsilanti reminded me of the famous theme from the television show *Cheers*: It was "a place where everyone knows your name."

Anchoring Downtown were the locally owned Ypsilanti Savings Bank and the National Bank of Ypsilanti, both committed to walk-in service for the community. Even Detroit Edison and Michigan Consolidated Gas Company provided walk-in service for their customers, allowing them to pay bills and make service requests. In one block, the owners of Campbell's Jewelers, Moray Jewelers, and Green Jewelers encouraged customers to purchase that "special item" from their stores. They even offered watch and clock repair.

"Service" was the byword everywhere in downtown: Brook's Market, Mack & Mack Furniture, Schaeffer's Hardware and Sporting Goods, Bazley's Meat Market, Richardson's Pharmacy, Willoughby's Shoe Store, Pear's Clothing for Men, and Mellencamp's Clothing (they even carried Boy Scout uniforms).

On the periphery, Carty's Music Store rented instruments to budding musicians throughout Washtenaw County; Ypsilanti Locksmith, Sesi Lincoln Mercury, Serbay Motors, and Jackson Cleaners all contributed to the owner-operated business climate. Haab's was joined by other owner-operated restaurants, including Casa Nova, TC's Spokeasy, the Tap Room, and the Spaghetti Bender.

A Changed Environment

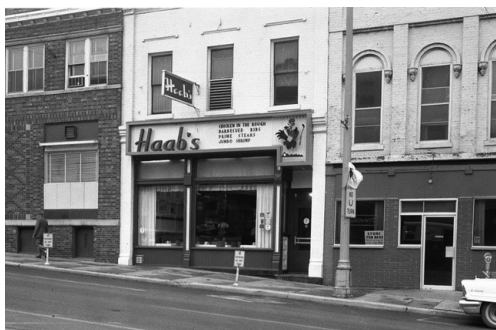
Ypsilanti had grown from a trading post in 1809 to a prospering community, largely due to the completion of the Chicago Road (a.k.a., Michigan Avenue and U.S. Highway 12).

A proliferation of beautiful homes had been built over the years, but by the 1970s, many were in disrepair and had lost the splendor of their original Greek Revival, Queen Anne, and Italian Villa architectural styles. The business district was made up predominantly of two- and three-story brick buildings constructed in the 1850s and 1860s.

Although Downtown Ypsilanti retailers had done well for years, the 1970s gave them new competition: the shopping mall. Eager to prove they could compete, business owners began adding all manner of shiny metal facades, hiding the original character of the buildings. Some felt that this approach was not beneficial and masked the unique historical architecture of a city chartered 150 years earlier. Some—apparently those

with clout—felt that modernizing the downtown's image would attract shoppers. Unfortunately, those facades only attracted pigeons.

That all began to change with the establishment of the Ypsilanti Historic District Commission. Much of the credit for the city's revitalization goes to Jane Schmiedeke, who chaired the commission and was instrumental in getting the district recognized by the National



Haab's Restaurant, c. 1958

Register of Historic Places in 1978. Meeting regularly for the past forty years, commission members have advised hundreds of property owners, landlords, and building occupants as to how to best showcase their own historical architecture. They have also encouraged removal of several buildings' metal facades, thus returning them to their original architectural beauty.

As more and more people became property owners in the Ypsilanti Historic District and began transforming their properties, the city began to bloom, which resulted in increased property values. The character of the city's business districts also changed as individual proprietors began to recognize the need to restore their architecturally interesting older buildings.

Downtown Lives On

Unique new stores and eateries began moving into Ypsilanti, which became known as a destination for lovers of antiques and anyone looking for something unique. When customers were drawn to one store, they discovered another in the same area...and then another. Since success breeds success, new retailers and eateries began springing up in the business district.

While it hasn't always been easy for property owners—or members of the Historic

District Commission—the establishment and recognition of the Historic District transformed an old, tired city into an exciting and beautiful one. This led to Ypsilanti being entered into the National Register of Historic Places and remains one of the largest historic districts in Michigan.

Sadly, nearly all of the businesses that populated Downtown in the 1970s have been gone for many years. Haab's joined those ranks, when we closed on March 3, 2022, after eighty-eight years in existence and in our forty-seventh year of ownership.



Michigan Avenue at Huron Street in the 1970s

A Note on Sources

Images are from the Ypsilanti Historical Society Archives.

About the Author

Longtime Ypsilanti resident Mike Kabat was the owner of Haab's restaurant, from 1976 to 2022, when it closed. He served as chair of the Ypsilanti Downtown Development Authority and was founding chair of the Central Business Community (CBC), Mike was also chair of the Façade Grant Committee and chair of the Ypsilanti Convention and Visitors Bureau. Mike was a member of the Ypsilanti Chamber of Commerce for many years.

A History of the Ypsilanti Food Cooperative

BY CORINNE SIKORSKI AND RODOLFO ALVARADO

The Humble Origins of a Movement

Since the 1800s, thousands of cooperatives (or co-ops) have sprouted up around the world to combat food insecurity and high food prices, promote food safety, and assist with other consumer needs. Although the Ypsilanti community has history with cooperatives dating back to the 1930s, the Ypsilanti Food Co-op officially incorporated in 1975. Its mission: to provide high-quality food and goods, produced ecologically and sustainably, while practicing cooperative economics.

The roots of this mission can be traced to the 1960s and 1970s, decades wherein people banded together not only to purchase natural foods that were not available elsewhere in the marketplace, but to ground itself in the community by providing healthy food options, people with jobs, farmers with a market, all while being owned by the shoppers using the store.

Prior to incorporation, the Ypsi Food Co-op grew out of a bag co-op which ran in the early 1970s. Orders of fresh produce, cider, or cheese—along with money—were dropped off at a member's house. The member tallied the money, prepared a shopping list, then drove to the Eastern Market in Detroit where goods were bought. An old orange refrigerator would be moved to various local churches in Ypsilanti, where the food would be distributed to members.

From Bag to Storefront

The transition from a bag co-op to a storefront co-op occurred on April 11, 1975, when members of the bag co-op formed a non-profit corporation called the Ypsilanti Cooperative Initiative (YCI). Under the articles of incorporation, the membership was empowered not only to supply high quality food at the lowest possible prices, but also to “organize and support community efforts aimed at improving the quality of life.” These

activities could include health, childcare, education, recycling, non-polluting energy systems, and cultural development.

The storefront Co-op, which was located at 955 Sheridan, was loosely organized, had no paid staff, and was run by volunteers. Bulk food was offered from five-gallon buckets displayed on milk crates, and a three-door glass cooler, along with the Co-op's original orange refrigerator, displayed perishable items. Granola was made at Faz's Pizza, a local pizza shop. When the time came to check out, if a volunteer was not available, customers paid by the honor system.

After firmly establishing itself as part of the Ypsilanti community, three years



Co-op shoppers

later, YFC was forced to close when the Sheridan building was sold. But by September of the same year, the store reopened at 308 Perrin, just across the street and down the block from Eastern Michigan University (EMU).

Aside from the goods that met mission standards, the store also carried whole grain breads that were

baked by the worker collective at the Wildflower Bakery in Ann Arbor. The bakery was one of a whole community of cooperatives in Ann Arbor that joined other co-ops like us, to set up the Michigan Federation of Food Co-ops. The federation owned a warehouse which served the food co-ops around the state, with products from around the country.

Being near EMU, YFC became stable, and since most members consisted of university students, YFC became a student organization. Being a non-profit in the state of Michigan made YFC eligible for this distinction. The only method of advertising an organization allowed on campus was to hold bagel sales. Unlike today, there were no fast food or coffee franchises on campus at the time, so student organizations were allowed to set up a table at Mark Jefferson or Pray-Harrold. Taking advantage of this opportunity, Co-op volunteers sold bagels, muffins, and fair-trade coffee. More importantly, the Co-op's association with EMU brought stability and greater recognition throughout Ypsilanti and Ann Arbor.

Stability and a New Home

Next came the challenge of establishing a framework for growth and stability. The challenge was addressed in 1982 when a general membership meeting was held, and the

member-owners charged the board of directors with developing a five-year plan. Once instituted, long-range plans resulted in changes. One of the most significant was the implementation of a one-person management system. The system replaced the collective structure, which had become cumbersome and inefficient. The board hired Corinne Sikorski as general manager, a position she holds to this day.

Aside from managerial reorganization, a capitalization plan was developed to raise money through the system of member-owner Fair Shares, which made members actual owners. The final measure recommended by the board was to secure a new site for the store. In time, the rented space in the Perrin Street building had fallen into poor condition.

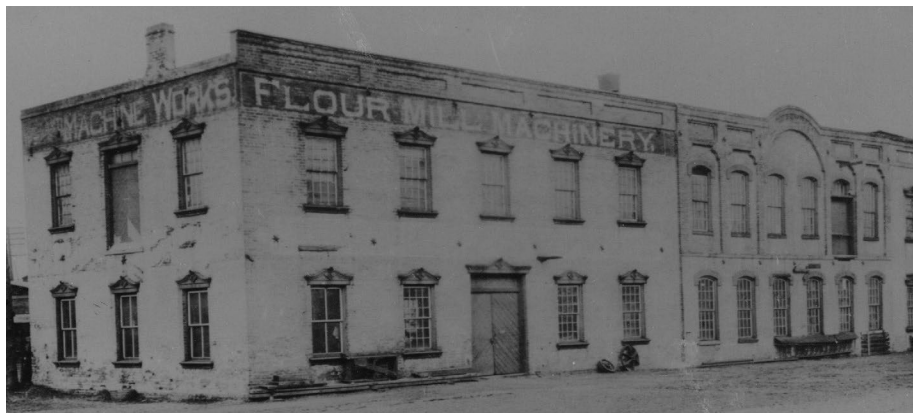
A new location was found in Depot Town, and in February 1984, the Co-op moved to the Mill Works at 312 North River Street. Built in 1840, the building originally housed the Ypsilanti Machine Works, a foundry that manufactured grinders for flour mills. In 1850, a similar-looking building was constructed at 308 North River. The two buildings were soon joined in the middle, and the middle section was given the address 310 North River. Aside from flour mill grinders, over the next hundred years, the foundry produced corn-shellors, elevator heads, boots with pulleys, scalpers, centrifugal reels for sugar refining, and a special reel for separating salt for use by the Diamond Crystal Salt Company of St. Clair, Michigan.

The building was in poor condition; there was a plumbing shop at 310 and an auto repair shop with a garage door in the façade of 308. Nevertheless, YFC made repairs to their section and, before long, were again achieving their mission of not only providing healthy and organic food but being fully invested in the community.

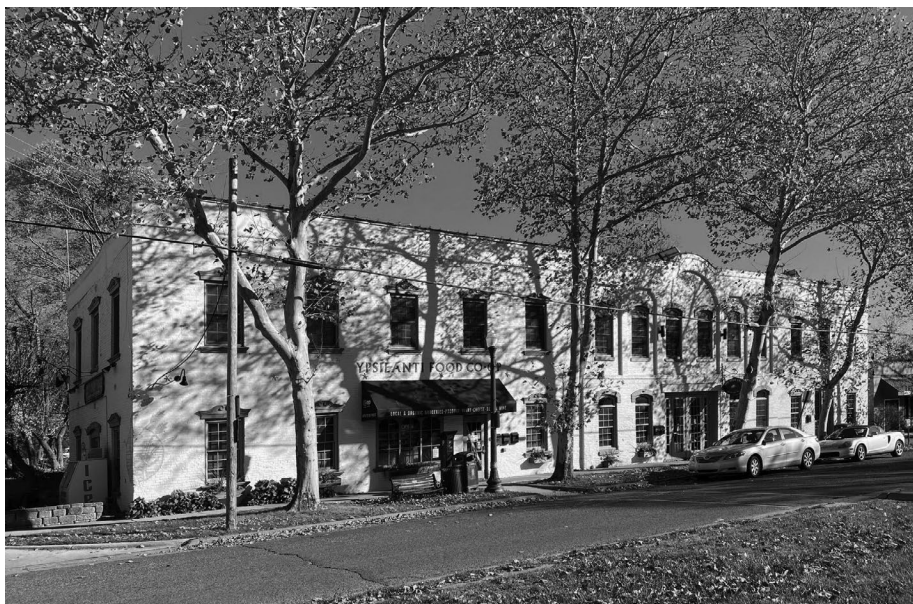
Two years after moving into the Mill Works, the building came up for sale. A group of concerned member-owners formed the Mill Works Partnership. They bought the building with the goal of guaranteeing affordable rent to the Co-op in order to ensure its continued use of the space. The purchase was completed by 1989, and the Co-op was able to expand into the adjoining space at 310. Arches separating the spaces were cleared of bricks. Renovations, which included rectifying the now condemned areas of the building, were undertaken.

Simultaneously, the Wildflour Bakery of Ann Arbor opened the Depot Town Sourdough Community Bakery and built a brick oven. When the bakery failed, YFC took over the bakery business, and it has been running successfully ever since. Continuous additions and renovations were made to the spaces including laying linoleum tiles, installing double-hung windows, brick tuck pointing, painting, replacing the metal iron front door with a wooden door, and adding an awning over the front entry.

By 2000, the Mill Works Partnership renovated spaces on the first and second floor into offices. They removed the garage door and added a stairway leading to the second floor, an area of the building that had no electricity or usable space. They also built two new apartments above the bakery, both with an art deco style that kept much of the brick work visible.



Mill Works, 1800s



Ypsilanti Food Co-op, 2022

A Sustainable Future

With long term plans met and exceeded, the coming years witnessed one accomplishment after another. The YFC became the Ypsi Food Co-op, and in 2002 joined ten co-op stores to form the Great Lakes Grocers Association; in 2004, it became a member of the National Co+op Grocers Association. These organizations work cooperatively to build stronger independent organizations through both individual and collective efforts.

In 2005, solar panels were installed for the bakery. In 2008, the Co-op obtained a liquor license and began to carry beer and wine, focusing on local and organic brews. In

2010, staff offices moved into a vacated second floor space to allow the Co-op to expand into the entire ground floor footprint of the Mill Works building.

In the same year, the Co-op founded a demonstration beekeeping effort called the Local Honey Project. Each year, up to thirty volunteers devote hundreds of hours of their time to increase survivor populations of honeybees, maintain hives, harvest urban honey, and enhance this critical aspect of our local food system.

Showing its commitment to a sustainable future for the local economy, in 2011, the Co-op underwent further building renovations and expansion. Materials recycling was implemented, and in-line hot water was installed, as were high-efficiency heat and light fixtures. Additional solar panels were installed, allowing the Co-op Bakery to be 100% renewably powered, while contributing a portion of its power to operate the store.

While the challenges overcome by the Co-op have been significant, none prepared it for the COVID pandemic and the unexpected success that came with it. On March 13, 2020, just three days before the country went into shutdown, the Co-op had its largest day in sales ever, and sales for the rest of the year were up 31%. With the increase in sales, employee wages were raised, and the Co-op moved ahead with plans to add a café. Completed in 2022, the cafe has a fully functioning kitchen, serving counter, restrooms, and sitting area. It is located on the south side of the Millworks Building, which means that it took the Co-op a little over thirty-eight years to fill the structure's entire first floor.

The old adage says that you cannot go back in time, but that is not true, because a stroll through the Ypsi Food Co-op is exactly that. More importantly, a stroll through the Co-op is proof positive that its founding mission has never waned. Shelves are filled with organic produce and locally sourced products, bakery goods are handmade and its operation self-sufficient, and the café is a source of healthy foods and a welcoming atmosphere.

No one knows what the future will bring, but one thing is for certain: the Ypsi Food Co-op will continue to fulfill its commitment to provide high quality food in an economically sustainable way, in close connection with Ypsilanti.

A Note on Sources

Images are provided by the Ypsilanti Historical Society Archives and the authors.

About the Authors

Corinne Sikorski came to Ypsilanti in 1974 to figure out a way to help change the world and begin her studies at Eastern Michigan University. Majoring in biology and geography, she was especially interested in environmental sustainability. While a student, she found the Co-op in her search for good food and became involved as a volunteer and, eventually, employee. While working parttime at YFC, she held various other positions including gardener at Matthei Botanical Gardens. She went back to EMU for a Master's

in Public Administration and was a member of the Downtown Development Authority board and the Friends of Ypsilanti Freighthouse board. Through all of the renditions of YFC, Corinne has raised a daughter and now enjoys two grandchildren.

Rodolfo (Rudy) Alvarado was elected to the Ypsi Food Co-op's Board of Directors in 2022 and has been an owner of the Co-op since moving here from Texas. He holds a Fine Arts Ph.D. from Texas Tech University and an MA in History from Eastern Michigan University, where he was a University Fellow and a Parks/King/Chavez Fellow. He is an eclectic writer whose academic work has been published by the University of Michigan Press, Michigan State Press, Alpha Books of New York, and the University of Houston's Arte Público Press.

When Pro(?) Football Came to Ypsilanti

BY STEVEN J. RAMOLD

The Man with a Plan

Ever since the Portsmouth Spartans moved to Detroit in 1934 and became the Lions, professional football has enjoyed popular support in southeast Michigan. As the Lions and other teams of the National Football League (NFL) gained popularity in the decades after the Second World War, invariably new leagues appeared to challenge the NFL's dominance of the nation's fanbase and associated profits. Rival football leagues have come and gone (such as the USFL, XFL, and UFL in recent years), but the lure of professional football dollars has always enticed city leaders, investors, and fans to contest the NFL's dominance.

Such was the case when Los Angeles lawyer Gary Davidson announced the new World Football League (WFL) in October 1973. Davidson appeared to be the ideal instigator of a new league to challenge an existing one. He had established two other operating professional leagues: the American Basketball Association and the World Hockey Association. What no one knew at the time was that, except for a few merged franchises, both of these rival leagues would succumb to the dominant National Basketball Association and National Hockey League by 1979. The WFL's fatal flaw was that Davidson rushed it onto the field too quickly, preventing the orderly establishment of franchises and rosters.

Davidson initially planned for play to begin in 1975, but a possible player strike in both the NFL and Canadian Football Leagues (CFL) meant Davidson saw an opportunity to sign well-known players who might be available. Davidson's hopes came to nothing, however, when both leagues settled their labor disputes before their regular seasons began. Already committed, the WFL launched prematurely with franchises struggling to organize before the league's first games, scheduled for July 10, just nine months after Davidson announced the new league.

The Detroit Wheels

Despite the haste with which the league began, cities were eager to obtain franchises. Regions with established NFL teams, such as Florida, New York, and Philadelphia, gained franchises, as did regions without NFL teams, such as Birmingham, San Antonio, and Portland. For its inaugural season, the WFL played its first season with twelve teams divided into two regional divisions. On December 13, 1973, Davidson confirmed that Detroit had received a franchise, to be named the Wheels, with the enthusiastic endorsement of newly-elected Mayor Coleman Young. Like many elected officials, Young saw professional sports as a means of alleviating urban problems and threw his support behind a proposed downtown stadium for the new team. Unable to use city money, Young had organized a group of potential investors to raise the \$500,000 franchise fee charged by the WFL. The original backers did not have funds to operate the team, however, so additional investors joined the ownership group to fund the franchise and hopefully recoup their investment from a successful team.

In this regard, the haste with which the WFL was organized continued to cause problems. Generally, a professional franchise has a majority owner, who provides a single leader and vision for the organization, and some minority owners with only minor decision-making power. The hurried establishment of the Wheels, however, prevented the creation of such an ownership model. As additional investors joined the organization, with each contributing various amounts between \$15,000 and \$50,000, the number of owners ballooned to more than thirty, with none owning enough of the team to hold majority control. Some notable members of the Wheels ownership group included singer Marvin Gaye, Motown Records executive Esther Edwards, and entrepreneur Mike Ilitch, who was later the majority owner of the Detroit Red Wings and Detroit Tigers. The rest of the ownership group represented a range of business experience (attorneys, physicians/dentists, real estate/construction, automobiles, and even a funeral home director), but none in sports management. The ownership proudly announced they had amassed \$3 million to begin operations, but it was more promised money than collected funds, and the team was always badly undercapitalized. Moreover, the unwieldy ownership situation created an unwieldy system with owners opting to pay expenses as they arose rather than entrust a pool of funds to its executive committee.

The lack of knowledge among the owners was reflected in the team's leadership, with experience at the college, but not pro, level. In February 1974, the Wheels hired Sonny Grandelius as the team's general manager. An All-American halfback for Michigan State earlier in his life, Grandelius had brief experience as an assistant coach in the NFL and as head coach at the University of Colorado, but he had left that job under a cloud of recruiting violations. Two days later, the team had a president and a head coach. Louis Lee, a standout defensive end at the University of Michigan and graduate of the University's Law School, became team president, becoming the first African American

hired to the front office of any professional sport. The head coach, Dan Boisture, held the same job at Eastern Michigan University, where in seven years he never had a losing season and took the team to one bowl game, but who also had no pro experience.

A Home in Ypsilanti

Now that the city had an organization, it needed a home, but its options were limited. The obvious choice was Tiger Stadium because of its mid-city location and experience hosting the NFL Detroit Lions. Unfortunately, the Lions had an exclusive use contract with the stadium, and, although they would move to their own facility in Pontiac in 1975, would not share Tiger Stadium with the Wheels. The only other option in Detroit was Wayne State University Stadium (now Tom Adams Field), but the 12,000-seat facility was too small. The University of Michigan rejected inquiries to play at Michigan Stadium, leaving the 20,000-seat Rynearson Stadium at Eastern Michigan University as their only option. Rynearson Stadium was not an ideal location for the Wheels. It was nearly an hour from downtown Detroit and the team had to spend \$400,000 to install lights for night games, a considerable expense for a team that anticipated only a short tenure there.

With the season looming, the team began to hunt for players. Like the NFL, the WFL conducted a draft of college football players, but the Wheels failed to benefit from the process. Despite the uncertain labor situation, recent college graduates still looked to the established NFL for careers, rather than the new upstarts. The Wheels drafted several players, but most shunned the new league in hope of a career in the NFL. Of the thirty-three players drafted by the Wheels, only three signed contracts. The WFL also looked to sign NFL free agents. Several teams were very successful following this path, but the Wheels managed to sign only two players via free agency. The biggest problem with obtaining talent was the sparse salary offered by the Wheels ownership. The badly under-capitalized team set its maximum salary at \$10,000 per player, which meant the Wheels paid about as much in team salary as it cost to install lights at Rynearson Stadium. In that year, the NFL's minimum salary was \$12,000 and the average salary was \$56,000. The players would also make less per game. NFL teams played a fourteen-game season, but, in a bid to woo season ticket sales, the WFL planned a twenty-game season. Not surprisingly, few NFL and CFL players found signing with the Wheels an attractive proposition. Instead, the team filled its roster with a mix of undrafted college players and former NFL/CFL players either released from their contracts or unsigned when their contracts ended.

As the players assembled for training camp, the first signs of the team's financial instability began to appear. Practicing at Rynearson Stadium, one of the owners suggested the team could stay in tents there rather than costly hotel rooms. The team bought supplies as needed, rather than purchase them in advance. Players were told to wait a day or two before cashing their first paychecks to ensure the team had enough to cover the cost.



The Wheels take the field for their first home game at Rynearson Stadium on July 31, 1974.

A Truncated Season

Despite these initial concerns, the team enthusiastically looked forward to its first game, an away contest on July 10 against the Memphis Southmen. In front of 30,000 fans (Elvis Presley was in the building), the Wheels lost by a tally of 34-15. The game established a trend that continued for the rest of the Wheels' truncated season, particularly the offensive line's inability to protect quarterback Bubba Wyche, who was frequently sacked and forced to hurry passes.

The strength of the team was its defense, which kept the Wheels in many close games. Of the team's thirteen losses, Detroit lost seven of them in the last two minutes of the game. Undaunted, a week later the Wheels hosted the Florida Blazers at Rynearson Stadium. In front of only 10,600 fans because the Wheels media director had sent out the wrong start time, the Wheels lost a tight game 18-14. Hoping a change of venue might reverse their fortunes, the team looked forward to its next game, in Honolulu against the Hawaiians, but lost by a 36-16 score. And the losing did not stop there, as the Wheels dropped their next seven games, one of them a "home" game played in London, Ontario, in a bid to expand the fan base but that sold only 5000 tickets.

On September 11, against the Blazers in Orlando, the Wheels finally came out on top by a score of 15-14. After losing ten games, the win over Florida was especially sweet as the Blazers were one of the best teams in the league, losing in the championship game at the end of the season. The victory, however, was too little and too late. A week earlier, Commissioner Davidson had taken direct control of the team, citing its financial

weakness and unpaid debts for everything from printing programs to the team's laundry. By that point players were unsure if their medical insurance was valid, and several had moved their families into shared housing in case their paychecks bounced.



Wheels QB Bubba Wyche pitches the ball to RB Sam Scarber against the Chicago Fire.

An Abrupt End

Davidson gave the ownership group one month to find a solution or he would revoke the franchise. Rumors circulated that some of the ownership group would buy out the small stakeholders to keep the team in Detroit, some claimed that a new single owner would buy out the ownership group, and there was serious discussion about selling the franchise to an owner who would move the team, either to Charlotte, North Carolina, or Shreveport, Louisiana. The talks came to nothing, the ownership group could not reach a consensus, and no hero arrived to save the Wheels. They lost the next three games to fall to 1-13, and on October 3, one year and one day after Gary Davidson announced the new league, the Wheels filed for bankruptcy, citing debts of more than \$1.5 million.

The continuing losses certainly harmed the Wheels' bottom line, but the team might have done better financially if they had made more of a local effort. The Wheels made it plain that their presence in Ypsilanti was only a temporary one by placing their promotional efforts in Detroit. Consequently, the Wheels never developed a fan base in Ypsilanti, as reflected in the anemic ticket sales for home games. The 0-4 Wheels managed

to sell almost 15,000 tickets for a July 31 game against the Birmingham Americans, but then ticket demand plummeted as the losses continued, with only 6000 in attendance for the 0-10 Wheels' last game at Rynearson Stadium, on September 6 against the Southern California Sun.

The Detroit Wheels were history, and the World Football League did not last much longer. Davidson stepped down as commissioner at the end of the season in hopes someone else could revitalize the league, but despite fielding ten teams, the WFL itself declared bankruptcy at the end of the 1975 season. The absence of a successful rival to the NFL in the decades since the WFL underscores the difficulty and great expense that a successful league entails, a problem made worse by both the WFL's hasty creation and the Wheels' amateurish existence.

A Note on Sources

There is a lot of coverage of the Wheels in the Detroit newspapers, but for this project I relied upon the *Ypsilanti Courier* and *Eastern Echo* to emphasize the local view of the Wheels. I tried to interview a Wheels fan, but considering the sparse ticket sales and the number of years that have passed, my search was in vain. The best study of the Wheels is Mike Speck's *Nothing but a Brand-New Set of Flat Tires: The Sad, Sorry Saga of the 1974 Detroit Wheels of the World Football League* (Haworth, NJ: St. Johann Press, 2018). All images are the property of the author.

About the Author

Steven J. Ramold is Professor of American History at Eastern Michigan University. Among the courses he offers is the History of American Sports.

Part Four:
Community Organizations

The Power of Sisterhood

The Palm Leaf Club

BY VALERIE EAGLIN

A Historic Beginning

The Palm Leaf Club is one of Michigan's oldest African American women's civic organizations. Birthed out of a charitable heart of service and generosity, the Palm Leaf Club made its debut on October 30, 1904, in Ypsilanti, Michigan, under its former name, the Trustee Helpers.

In 1843, Brown Chapel African Methodist Episcopal (A.M.E.) Church organized through informal meetings at the homes of its founders, Sylus Jones and Florence Thompson. By 1847, congregants had filed papers of incorporation with Washtenaw County for the African Methodist Episcopal Society, making it the oldest African American church in Ypsilanti and the second oldest active A.M.E. church in Michigan.

Jesse and Isa Steward donated two plots to the church on the southwest corner of Buffalo Street and South Adams Street in Ypsilanti, where Brown Chapel members built their first church, in 1870. Membership continued to grow, so they constructed a larger brick church at the same location, which was completed in 1904 under the leadership of the late Reverend Lewis Pettiford.

The Trustee Helpers, an auxiliary organization to Brown Chapel A.M.E. Church, was created to assist in managing the church's secular business. The Trustee Helpers raised the money to buy the church's pews and chandeliers and contributed to paying off the church debt following the building construction.

The founding members included: Mrs. Emma Anderson (President), Mrs. Nellie Green, Mrs. Mary Jones, Mrs. Amanda Moore, Mrs. Temperance Woods, Mrs. Mary Ann Kersey, Mrs. Rebecca Ward, Mrs. Elizabeth Martin, and Mrs. Mary Eleanora Delaney McCoy (wife of Elijah McCoy, who was "The Real McCoy").

African American Women's Clubs

As early as 1793, Black women started to come together to create organizations that looked after their community's welfare. Black women's clubs helped raise money for the anti-slavery newspaper the *North Star* (published by Frederick Douglass). Many Black churches owed their existence to the dedicated work of African American women organizing in their communities.

After ratifying the Thirteenth Amendment in 1865, Black women continued to organize and often worked with churches to ensure the care of their communities. The club movement for Black women in the 1890s became more secular and began to expand its focus to include social and political reform.

Black women found themselves standing between the movement for civil rights (supporting their Black men) and the women's suffragist movement, but they were not fully embraced by either. In 1895, Florence Bargarnie of the English Anti-Lynching League sent a letter to James Jacks, the president of the Missouri Press Association, asking journalists to help battle lynching in the United States. He responded with the following:

The Negroes in this country are wholly devoid of morality. They know nothing of it except as they learn by being caught for flagrant violations of law and punished... They consider it no disgrace but rather an honor to be sent to prison and to wear striped clothes. The women are prostitutes, and all are natural liars and thieves... Out of 200 in this vicinity, it is doubtful if there are a dozen virtuous women of that number who are not daily thieving from the white people.

His response to Florence Bargarnie triggered Black women into action. Mrs. Josephine St. Pierre Ruffin, the leader of Boston's New Era Club, sent a national "Call to Confer" to women's organizations of color to resist negative representations of Black women.

Black women and organizations met in Washington, D.C., in July 1896, at the First Annual Convention of the National Federation of Afro-American Women. Out of that conference, the National Federation of Afro-American Women (Boston), the Woman's Era Club (Boston), the Colored Women's League (Washington, D.C.), and other smaller clubs merged to form the National Association of Colored Women (NACW). Notable founders of the NACW include Mary Church Terrell, Harriet Tubman, and Ida B. Wells. NACW adopted the motto "Lifting as we climb." In 1904, the organization incorporated itself as the National Association of Colored Women's Clubs (NACWC).

Trustee Helpers/Palm Leaf Club founding member, Mrs. Mary McCoy, and her good friend Mrs. Lucinda "Lucy" Smith Thurman founded the Michigan State Association of Colored Women's Clubs (MSACWC). The new organization was under the umbrella of the NACWC. The Michigan State Association of Colored Women's Clubs

dedicated its mission to the welfare, rights, and education of Black women and families.

Mary Eleanor Delaney McCoy came to Ypsilanti in the early 1870s. In the 1880s, she became an activist, suffragist, philanthropist, and club woman known as the “Mother of Clubs.” Mrs. McCoy established the Sojourner Truth Memorial Association of Michigan, which provided scholarships to children of the former enslaved to attend the University of Michigan. She financially supported the McCoy Home for Colored Children and established the Phyllis Wheatley Home for Aged Colored Women, in Detroit. Mrs. McCoy marched in the 1913 Suffrage Parade in Washington, D.C., and attended the National American Woman Suffrage Association’s Victory Convention in Chicago. She brought this spirit of service through clubs to the Trustee Helpers.

The Club Expands Its Mission

Over the years, the Trustee Helpers realized the necessity for an organized and systematic effort to promote the general welfare of African Americans in the city of Ypsilanti and surrounding communities. Combating the stereotypes of the mass media of that era, they recognized the urgency to furnish evidence of their moral, intellectual, and material strength and the progress of Black people.

In 1934, the Trustee Helpers changed their name to the Palm Leaf Club and opened their membership (by invitation only) to other African American Christian women in the community. The Palm Leaf Club became a member of the Ypsilanti Association of Women’s Clubs (YAWC), the MSACWC, the Central Region Association of Colored Women’s Clubs, and the NACWC. The Palm Leaf Club’s motto is “With God as our guide, our motto is success.”

The Palm Leaf Club has been instrumental in many community projects and activities. In 1942, the club helped to establish the Carver Community Center, first located at Harriet Street in Ypsilanti, and then later, at 401 Armstrong Street. The Carver Community Center would later evolve into the Parkridge Community Center. The community center symbolized a beacon of hope, and it became a staple on Ypsilanti’s south side. It served as a recreation center and meeting place for the community’s youth. It also served as a classroom for multiple grades in the early years.

In 1943, Mrs. Gertrude Francois Warren initiated the Palm Leaf Club Scholarship for young African American men and women graduates of Ypsilanti High School to help further their education. This scholarship continues to this day.

The Palm Leaf Club and other member clubs of the Ypsilanti Association of Women’s Clubs worked together to purchase property for its first clubhouse at 426 First Avenue in Ypsilanti. After outgrowing that building, the YAWC purchased a larger home at 319 South Washington Street as its meeting house. The newer clubhouse had an apartment for a family and space for other African American organizations to meet and hold events.

The Palm Leaf Club has always worked with young women, involving them in



Palm Leaf Club, c. 1940s. First Row (L to R): Amanda Whitclip, Thelma Goodman, Mary Jones, Gertrude Francis, Bessie Starks, Mrs. Ward, Minnie Neely, Liz Martin, and Florence Harris. **Second Row (L to R):** Unknown, Ethel Neely, Mrs. Day, Edna Kersey, Margaret Russel, Grace Aray, Erma Freemon, Hazel Reid, and Mattie Carter. **Third Row (L to R):** Mrs. Upthegrone, Lucille Andrews, May Freeman, Martha Jackson, Ethel Williams, Viola Carter, Anna Van Gleyke, Evelyn Beatty, and Lucille Richardson

local club activities. Club members invited young ladies, pre-teen through high school, to participate in state, regional, and national conferences. The club also supports The Women of Poise and Prestige, a group of collegiate women, at Western Michigan University.

The Palm Leaf Club has always helped families in Ypsilanti. A nursery school found its first home at the First Avenue clubhouse. It outgrew that house, and the club moved the nursery school to the Carver Community Center on Harriet Street.

When the community center could no longer meet the needs of the expanding nursery school, Mrs. Louise Lane Bass petitioned the State of Michigan (on behalf of the Palm Leaf Club) for a license to provide children's daycare services. The state granted the permit, and the club moved the nursery school to the basement of Mrs. Bass's home at 738 Harriet Street. Mrs. Bass became the unofficial director (unpaid) of the nursery school. Other members of the Palm Leaf Club, such as Mrs. Mary Louise Foley, also helped to take care of the children. The club financially supported the nursery school and donated food and beverages for the children's meals.

The Work Continues Today

Through the years, the Palm Leaf Club has contributed food baskets and donations to needy families, working with organizations such as Stand for Children and events like Make a Difference Day. The club distributed books to the Parkridge Community Center, the West Willow Neighborhood Association, the Washtenaw County Head Start Program, and People to People, a humanitarian organization, in Johannesburg, South Africa.



The Palm Leaf Club House, 319 South Washington Street



Palm Leaf Club after the annual Club Retreat, 2022. Sitting (L to R): Darlene Ladson Barbosa, Paulette Dozier, Eloise Johnson (President), Valerie Eaglin, and Donna Mitchell. Standing (L to R): Lois Allen Richardson, Candice Spencer, Danielle Stephens, Judy Jackson, Stacey Mack, Linda Horne, Amarie Eadie, and Ramona Eadie

In 2017, the Palm Leaf Club began servicing Parkridge summer camps by preparing and serving nutritious breakfasts. In 2018, they donated school supplies for the Totes4Teachers project and Estabrook Elementary School.

Other organizations have invited Palm Leaf Club members to present on a variety of topics, such as: “Race Relations in Ypsilanti: Turning Women’s Clubs into Allies” for the Ladies’ Literary Club of Ypsilanti, in 2021; “Women and the Vote” for the League of Women Voters, in 2020; and “Remembering Ypsilanti’s African American Civil War Veterans,” at the dedication of the Memorial at Highland Cemetery, in 2022. The Palm Leaf Club maintains the memorial.

The Palm Leaf Club has been honored many times, most recently by the Annual Parkridge Summer Festival, Joe Dulin Community Day, and Eastern Michigan University’s Martin Luther King, Jr., Humanitarian Award.

The women of the Palm Leaf Club have all been impressive women and community leaders. The club has sustained itself through the decades by investing in the youth of the community and inviting younger generations of women to join the cause.

A Note on Sources

Information for this essay comes from Palm Leaf Club minutes, Ypsilanti District Library, the Palm Leaf Club Historical Committee, A. P. Marshall African American Oral History Archive, NACWC history, MSACWC history, and newspaper articles. All images are from the Palm Leaf Club archive.

About the Author

Valerie Eaglin was born and raised in Ypsilanti, Michigan. She is a graduate of Ypsilanti High School. Eaglin earned a BA in Education from Western Michigan University and an MA in Guidance and Counseling from the University of Michigan. She worked as a youth counselor with the Washtenaw County juvenile courts, as a counselor and coordinator at Washtenaw Community Service Agency, and, later, as a senior counselor and program specialist for the University of Michigan Center for the Education of Women. Valerie has been a member of the Palm Leaf Club, the national, regional, and state associations of Colored Women’s Clubs for over twenty years. She is currently the Palm Leaf Club parliamentarian.

A Brief History of the Ladies' Literary Club of Ypsilanti

BY LULU CARPENTER SKINNER AND PENNY SCHREIBER

"An old-fashioned club, with an old-fashioned name, in an old-fashioned house, with old-fashioned ideals for right living, right thinking, and friendliness."

— from the early records of The Ladies' Literary Club of Ypsilanti

It is remarkable that a women's club that began meeting in the nineteenth century continues to thrive in the twenty-first. Remembrance of things past—continuity of club traditions and awareness of the splendid women from long ago whose names grace faded club yearbooks—partly explains the club's resilience. But without a doubt, a key reason for the club's longevity can be traced back to 1913, when members made the brave, astute, and prescient decision to purchase their wonderful 1840s Greek Revival clubhouse. During the more than one hundred years that the ladies have been meeting at 218 North Washington Street, the upkeep of the house has been an important goal for them to coalesce around. The ladies take great pride in superbly maintaining their home in Ypsilanti's historic district for their own use and the use of the community.

The Beginnings

The Ladies' Literary Club of Ypsilanti, Michigan, organized in 1878, is one of the oldest women's clubs in the state. In 1878, President Rutherford B. Hayes was President of the United States; a young man at Menlo Park, New Jersey, created a sensation when he announced that he had perfected a practical system for lighting homes and public buildings with an electric current; and Henry Ford was regarded as a dreamer.

Women were not welcome in the business world in 1878. Few professions opened their doors to women, and they did not have the right to vote or own property. Because Ypsilanti had a fine seminary and a college for the training of teachers, the life of the mind was held in high esteem. The city was rapidly enlarging due to the arrival of



Mrs. Sarah Putnam [Ladies' Literary Club archives]

families from the eastern states. These new settlers brought their culture and education to Ypsilanti.

The ladies of the growing city resolved not to be left behind their husbands and children. They, too, would improve their minds by pursuing culture and learning the art of fine living. As early as 1861, a group of Ypsilanti women read David Hume's *History of England* and later studied the plays of Shakespeare. The time was propitious to organize a literary club.

Many of the city's women had been active in the Home Association organized in 1875 to help the needy, and they had also established a library in the city. Now the women discussed the possibility of organizing a literary club. Mrs. Daniel

Putnam suggested the plan to her co-volunteers. Sarah Putnam was from Kalamazoo, and she remembered the effective work and good comradeship in the literary circles of that city and wished for Ypsilanti the same. With the inspiration and leadership of Mrs. Putnam, who was blind, the idea grew into reality.

The First Meetings

The preliminary meeting of the club was held on May 7, 1878, at 206 South Washington Street, the home of Mrs. Paine. Mrs. Putnam had asked Mrs. Follett and Mrs. Watling to act with her on plans for the organization of the club. In June they called together seventeen ladies in the library rooms of the Arcade Building to begin the study of Africa's geography, resources, art, and literature.

At the first meeting, the ladies chose Mrs. Daniel Putnam as their president. In the fall, the ladies prepared and adopted a constitution. Very little formal business was conducted in the club's early years. The name Ladies' Literary Club was chosen by common consent, as the word "woman" then applied to kitchen maids and not to the mistress of the house. In the club's early years, meetings were in the pleasant homes of members or in rooms at the library in the Arcade Building.

The ladies had embarked on a very ambitious program that led them on literary and historical journeys to many interesting places and enlivened the routine of their daily lives. From 1879 to 1880 they read and studied the French Revolution, followed by a thorough study of Germany. In club year 1883–84, they entered the Tudor period,

followed by study of the After-Tudor Period, in 1884–85. Rome and its antiquities were their subjects in 1885–86, Spain in 1886–87, and Greece in 1887–88.

By the beginning of the twentieth century, the programs were becoming more varied, and a music committee was added in 1908. The club's programs were no longer entirely literary. The changes came, no doubt, as the club began to broaden its activities to include civic affairs and political issues. From a self-centered group seeking self-improvement, the club now expanded its interests to national and worldwide affairs.

"The object of this society shall be the mutual improvement of its members through the study of literature, art, science, and the vital interests of the day," became the official purpose of the club. In 1918, a clause was added: "but also to serve as an energizing force for all that makes for civic or community betterment." And so it reads today.

A Clubhouse of Their Own

By 1910 the group had outgrown the south room of the library, and they were meeting in the Masonic Temple. In 1913, members learned that the Grant residence, at 218 North Washington Street, was for sale.

The Grant house was thought to be a most desirable future home for the club. One of the oldest houses in the city, it had been built in 1842 by Arden Ballard in the Greek Revival style so popular in the United States at that time. Much discussion, pro and con, ensued. The asking price of \$3,000 was a large sum for a small group of women to raise. Time was not on their side, because the house had to be sold at once.



The Clubhouse, 218 North Washington, 2021 [Paul Schreiber]

By December 10, 1913, the ladies had made up their minds. Mrs. Ann Bassett's \$200 seed money facilitated the purchase of the clubhouse. Members wondered where they would get the rest of the money. Neither of the two local banks had any intention of granting a mortgage to a group of women.

At this critical moment, Mrs. Atwood McAndrew gained the floor and announced with pride that Thomas W. McAndrew had offered to lend them \$2,000. Mr. McAndrew had more faith in the ability of the women to pay off the debt than had the presidents of two banks.

The first meeting in the club's new home took place on October 14, 1914. Now that the ladies had their dream home, they had to pay for it. Like a bird of evil omen, the mortgage hovered over the lovely old clubhouse for fourteen years. Then came the day, in 1928, when members celebrated the club's fiftieth anniversary. The mortgage, dated February 7, 1914, was burned in the flames of a taper with proper ceremony, and Mrs. Sarah George, a member since 1879, delighted her audience by recalling anecdotes and incidents from the club's history.

The flames of the taper had scarcely died out before Mrs. Henry Frain proposed a Sarah George Loan Fund, to be funded initially by a gift of \$5 from each member. Fundraising activities were also proposed to bring the fund quickly to \$500. Mrs. Frain set up the loan fund with the purpose of benefiting young women at Ypsilanti High School, whose selection would be based on scholarship, leadership, and moral character. In 1953, the first recipient of a Sarah George Scholarship was Ypsilanti High School honor student Miss Betty Ann Curtis.

The clubhouse has undergone many changes through the years. These included enlarging the club's seating space, and this was approved by prominent local architect Emil Lorch. Lorch was also the first dean and one of the founders of the University of Michigan College of Architecture. Lorch believed the Ladies' Literary Club's house to be one of the finest examples of Greek Revival architecture in the country.

In club year 1933–34, with so many people out of work, a group of eight architects, headed by Professor Lorch, had the time to invade the beautiful and interesting 1840s Greek Revival house at 218 North Washington Street. They measured it inside and out, while jotting down figures in notebooks. The architects recorded all of the house's unusual features, including its large pillars and metal lacework on the outside, and its interesting doorways, aproned windows, and Victorian fireplaces on the inside. The result of the architects' study of the house was its selection by the Advisory Committee of the American Buildings Survey "because of its age and architectural interest as being worthy of most careful preservation for future generations." This document was deposited in the Library of Congress in Washington, D.C. The house was the first one in the state of Michigan to be so designated.

Other clubs and organizations rent the clubhouse regularly, and wedding receptions,

teas, and other social functions are often held in its charming parlors. Many pieces of furniture have been donated over the years by members. In 2022, founding member Mrs. Eunice Watling's beautiful pier mirror, among many other antique treasures, still graces the clubhouse's main meeting room.

Postwar Achievements

The involvement of club members in elected civic positions began in 1962 when Susan Sayre was elected to the Ypsilanti City Council. Sayre was later chosen by council members to be Ypsilanti's first woman mayor. In 1970, Sayre was elected to the Washtenaw County Board of Supervisors. The civic involvement of club members continued with Nathalie Edmunds' election to City Council in 1970, a position she held until 1978.

In November 1965, the first marker on a historic house in Ypsilanti, bearing the Michigan State Historical Commission designation No. 47, was presented to the club; and on March 16, 1972, the club was notified that its clubhouse was now listed in the National Register of Historic Places.

In February 1970, preservation architect Richard Frank spoke to the membership. After that, a building committee was appointed, headed by Mildred Harris, and a year of intense study and discussion ensued. The need for a caretaker's apartment, a larger and more convenient kitchen, additional restrooms, and basement space for workshop activities and storage was evident. Suggestions presented at a second meeting with architect Frank led to the formulation of final remodeling plans.

The total price for the remodeling was set at \$58,000. The club had in hand \$20,000,



Ladies at tea, 1970 [Gary Cooperman]

and a mortgage of \$38,000 was arranged, with two local banks loaning equal amounts. Women applying for a mortgage were no longer persona non grata at Ypsilanti banks.

Since the early 1980s, Sarah George Scholarship funds have been invested in conservative mutual funds. A third named scholarship was added in 2014–15, in honor of late club member, past president, and community leader Barbara Weiss.

By 2022, the Sarah George fund combined with a Joan Willoughby fund, established by Dr. Robert Willoughby in 1999 in memory of his wife, a past president, had grown large enough to allow the club to award six scholarships to local young women in the amount of \$3,500.

The Twenty-first Century

Today, the Ladies' Literary Club of Ypsilanti continues to thrive, bringing in speakers twice monthly during its club year, from October to May. Beloved traditions, such as Drama Day, Gala Day, and May's Annual Luncheon survive. Also, the tradition of preserving and treasuring its historic Greek Revival clubhouse remains paramount. The COVID-19 pandemic resulted in the club transitioning from its much-loved November Christmas Bazaar fundraiser to an annual October Fall Fest. The club has benefited from a recent generous bequest it received from late community member Joe Lawrence.

A Note on Sources

Portions of this essay were adapted from *The Ladies' Literary Club, 125 Years: 1878–2003*.

About the Authors

The late Lulu Carpenter Skinner was a member of the Ladies' Literary Club from 1924 to 1963 and served as president from 1945 to 1947. Penny Schreiber has been a member of the Ladies' Literary Club since 1990 and served as president from 1998 to 2000. She is a retired editor, journalist, and book editor. Penny was managing editor of the *Ann Arbor Observer* for twelve years. She volunteered for the University Musical Society Ambassadors and served on the University of Michigan Wallenberg Committee from 2001 to 2020.

Connecting Communities

The Formation of the Ypsilanti District Library and Beyond

BY SARAH ZAWACKI

Educating the Community

Libraries have long been cornerstones of communities, connecting citizens with information, entertainment, and more. The Ypsilanti District Library (YDL), in various iterations, has been providing these resources and services to the area for more than 150 years. The last fifty years have been particularly important to the library. It has grown significantly during this time, expanding from a public library funded by the City of Ypsilanti to an independent library district serving the three communities of the City of Ypsilanti, Ypsilanti Township, and Superior Township. As a unifying presence among different communities, YDL maintains a mission “to enrich life, stimulate intellectual curiosity, foster literacy, and encourage an informed citizenry.” Throughout the decades, one thing has remained clear: community members cherish the Ypsilanti District Library and all it has to offer.

In 1868, six women opened a “ladies’ library” in the Arcade Building on Huron Street in Ypsilanti, featuring a collection of 175 books and a subscription fee of \$1. This marked the beginning of library services to the Ypsilanti community. Eventually, the Ladies’ Library Association of Ypsilanti, as it was officially named, expanded into the Starkweather house on Huron Street, a gift from Mrs. Mary Ann Starkweather herself.

In 1889, the Ypsilanti Common Council voted to take over the library’s expenses and waived the subscription fee. The City of Ypsilanti officially took over the operation of the library in 1949 and changed the name to the Ypsilanti Public Library. By 1963, the library had moved to the former post office building on Michigan Avenue. Importantly, the city began contracting with Ypsilanti Township to provide library services to its citizens at this time. This was the beginning of a partnership that eventually led to the formation of the future library district.

Economic hardships hit Ypsilanti and the rest of the country in the 1970s. The library

faced multiple budget cuts and struggled to survive, despite the mayor and city council doing their best to keep things afloat. In 1982, the city proposed that the library close permanently.

However, library supporters quickly sprang into action to find a solution. The Ypsilanti Library Advisory Board was formed to explore all potential options. The board decided that the formation of an independent library district comprising the City of Ypsilanti and Ypsilanti Township, and supported by a dedicated millage, would be the best path forward. Such a district would separate the library from local politics; allow for increased staffing, hours, and materials; and provide an opportunity for more long-term planning, including the potential for another branch. The proposed library district would have its own elected board of trustees, made up of citizens from both municipalities, to govern it.

Getting a millage passed was no easy feat. First, both Ypsilanti and Ypsilanti Township officials had to approve the plan in order for it to be on the ballot. This was achieved and the question placed on the April 1982 ballot. The Advisory Board, the Friends of the Library, and library supporters worked hard to gain support for the millage, adopting the slogan “Save Your Library.” Supporters participated in local parades; had an information booth at the Heritage Festival; held phone banking sessions; sent letters to civic leaders; received endorsements from the Ypsilanti Area Chamber of Commerce and others; and had local groups, like the UAW, include millage information in their newsletters. Then, just days before the election, the library closed on March 25, 1982, due to a lack of funds. If the millage vote failed, the library would not re-open, a dismaying thought to many in the community.

All the hard work paid off. The library district millage received overwhelming approval by voters in both the city and the township. The two municipalities chose to unite their communities around the library. The library building reopened just a few months later on June 1. The newly created Ypsilanti District Library immediately set to work to provide its patrons with a top-notch library experience.

During the 1980s and 1990s, renovations were completed at the Michigan Avenue branch, the materials collection was evaluated and expanded, new township branches called Roundtree and Peters opened, and a campaign for Superior Township to join the district began. By the 2020s, YDL had grown to three library branches and a bookmobile, all unique in their own ways.

Let’s take a closer look at each one.

YDL-Michigan Avenue, City of Ypsilanti

The Michigan Avenue library, in the former post office building, has been a recognizable landmark in downtown Ypsilanti for generations. For a historic building, a lot of technological changes in library service have taken place over the past fifty years.

One such change was computer automation of library book and patron records in the early 1990s. Staff recall having to use a regiscope film camera to keep track of checked out materials: the machine would take a picture of the patron's library card and a book's check-out card. It was quite a time-consuming process! With barcodes, both for books and patrons, everything could be handled by the computer. This freed up time for staff to work on other projects.

Additional technological advancements over the years included the switch from a physical card catalog to an electronic one, the introduction of computers for public use, the arrival of the internet, and YDL's very own podcast. As of 2023, YDL-Michigan has served the downtown community for nearly sixty years and is still going strong, providing reference and computer help; a curated collection of materials for children, teens, and adults; and a variety of programming.



Ypsilanti District Library, Michigan Avenue

YDL-Bookmobile, Districtwide

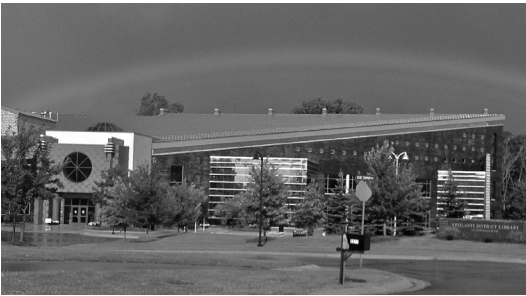
The bookmobile is a mobile library and has been a familiar sight in the Ypsilanti area for decades. The library's first bookmobile debuted in 1969 and one continues to operate today, visiting neighborhoods and schools. It is a great way to excite students about their library and for patrons to conveniently get materials without having to travel. Before YDL-Whittaker was built, the bookmobile served patrons in rural areas that had not yet developed. Staff recall driving the bookmobile down dirt roads and seeing people pass by on horseback. The YDL bookmobile has also been a staple at the Ypsilanti Fourth of July parade, delighting onlookers of all ages. Step aboard the bookmobile in 2022 and you'll find more than 4,000 library items to choose from.



Ypsilanti District Library Bookmobile, District wide

YDL-Whittaker Road, Ypsilanti Township

One of the biggest YDL accomplishments in the past fifty years was the building and opening of the Whittaker Road branch. During the 1990s, a bigger library branch



Ypsilanti District Library Whittaker Branch, Ypsilanti Township

emerged as a top priority for YDL, due to increased library use by a growing population. After considering various locations, including the old Ypsilanti High School building on Cross Street, a piece of land on Whittaker Road in southern Ypsilanti Township was chosen for the new branch. The public showed their support for the library by passing a bond to fund the new building.

The 60,000-square-foot, two-story building, an architectural marvel, opened on January 7, 2002.

The collection nearly doubled in size with all the new space, plus the new building featured a computer lab, a multipurpose community space, a local history room, and much more. Excited patrons celebrated their new library that day, parking all along Whittaker Road just to experience the new building. YDL celebrated the twentieth anniversary of the Whittaker Road location in 2022. It remains a much-loved treasure of the community.

YDL-Superior, Superior Township

Since it became an independent library district, YDL was able to explore the possibility of adding more municipalities to its service area. One such community was Superior Township, which had contracted with the library at different times over the past fifty years, but it was not a legal part of the library's district. There were always strong supporters of the library in Superior Township, and they advocated over the years for additional library services that the community could enjoy if it joined the library district.

Once again, local support of the library was evident when Superior Township voted to join the Ypsilanti District Library on August 8, 2006. The next year, a township branch opened on MacArthur Boulevard in the fire station, with plans for an independent branch already in the works. Unfortunately, the economic recession that began in 2008 delayed those plans, but YDL remained dedicated to building a branch for Superior Township no matter what. A successful millage passed in 2018 which provided funding for the new building.

The new Superior Township library opened on November 14, 2022, to much excitement. A month prior to the opening, more than four hundred community members joined together in a “book brigade” to move the materials from the old building to the new one. It was another wonderful example of YDL patrons showing their love for their library. YDL is excited to have expanded its presence in Superior Township and looks forward to serving the community in new and improved ways.



**Ypsilanti District Library Superior Branch,
Superior Township**

The Ypsilanti District Library Today

The Ypsilanti District Library has evolved in numerous ways since its formation. Although the original iteration of the library more than 150 years ago focused on lending books, it has expanded over the years to offer a variety of materials and services. There have been national traveling exhibits displayed, songwriting workshops held with well-known musicians, a school readiness service named TALK (Text and Learn for Kindergarten), multiple TEDx events held for community members to share their knowledge and wisdom, tax forms prepared for low-income and senior patrons, mayoral forums that hosted local candidates, digital collections created such as an archive of local Black oral histories, Wi-Fi hotspots lent, and much more.

The YDL of 2023 features not only expected items like books (those are never going away!) and DVDs, but a Library of Things: non-traditional items to check out such as sewing machines, musical instruments, board games, tools, and even a ghost hunting kit. These are items that patrons may need to use only once or may want to try before buying their own. (And it is not a new idea. YDL-Michigan actually lent paintings by local artists in the 1990s.) All in all, the communities making up the library's district can enjoy more than 400,000 items available to check out. There is truly something for everyone.

It is impossible to discuss the past fifty years without mentioning 2020. The whole world changed in 2020 with the COVID-19 pandemic. To protect the health of patrons and staff, YDL closed on March 13, 2020. It would not reopen to the public for several months while the pandemic raged on. However, library staff remained dedicated during this time, quickly adapting to ever-changing circumstances. Staff made calls to senior patrons to check in and see if they needed anything, hosted virtual storytimes for children, and provided curbside pickup for library materials. The library even distributed free COVID-19 tests to patrons. In these unprecedented times, patrons could rely on YDL to be there, demonstrating the important role of libraries to communities.

What started out as an idea for a library among six women has blossomed over the years into a full-fledged presence in the Ypsilanti area. Like any institution, there have been ups and downs, but the Ypsilanti District Library has always remained dedicated to being a trusted community resource. Overall, it has been an exciting fifty years for YDL, going from one branch to three, plus a bookmobile, and continuously striving to bring patrons new and unique services and collections. Who knows what the next fifty years will bring!

Thank you to the communities of Ypsilanti, Ypsilanti Township, and Superior Township for all their support of the Ypsilanti District Library.

A Note on Sources

This chapter was written using a variety of sources: newspaper articles, YDL staff interviews, and YDL documents and newsletters. All images belong to the Ypsilanti District Library.

About the Author

Sarah Zawacki, MLIS, is the former head librarian of the acquisitions department at the Ypsilanti District Library.

Many Are Called

Religious Life in Ypsilanti

COMPILED BY BILL NICKELS

Compiler's Note

From the founding of the City of Ypsilanti in 1823 to the present, Ypsilanti's churches have been a major part of our community. Ypsilanti's postal ZIP codes now include the addresses of 132 churches. Of those, more than forty are within city limits. Knowing we could not include all of them, following is a selection of churches that responded to a request for a brief description of their histories and activities. All images are from the Ypsilanti Historical Society Archives.

Mount Olive Missionary Baptist Church, 718 North Prospect

In 1961, Reverend James Johnson revealed to his wife, Pearline, that God had given him a vision to begin a church to be called Mount Olive Missionary Baptist Church. In 1962, Mount Olive Missionary Baptist Church was organized and moved into their first church building at 948 Watling Boulevard.

From 1964 to 1968, Reverend Willie Moses served as pastor. In 1965, the church was incorporated in Lansing, Michigan. From 1968 to 1976, Reverend E. T. Thomas served as pastor. From 1976 to 1979, Reverend James Wilks served as pastor. Under his leadership, the membership grew to more than one hundred. From 1979 to 2017, Minister Garther Roberson, Jr., served as pastor. He retired after thirty-eight years of service. During his tenure, the church purchased new property and moved to its current location on 718 North Prospect Road with 234 members.

On August 20, 2018, Dr. Kevin Wade was called out of Texas to serve as pastor. Dr. and Mrs. Wade have created the Elijah and Elvira Projects. Both ministries will soon move to teach the standards of financial literacy, first aid and CPR, and self-defense, and will prepare those who would like to further their education in college or trade school.

Contributed by Pastor Dr. Kevin Wade



Mount Olive Missionary Baptist Church, 2022

First Baptist Church of Ypsilanti, 1110 West Cross

The First Baptist Church of Ypsilanti (FBCY) was founded in 1836 and has been an active member of the community. From 1925 through 2016, the church was blessed with only four pastors: Reverend William R. Shaw (1925–64), Reverend William Bingham (1965–81), Reverend Vivan Martindale (1981–99), and Pastor Randy Johnson (2001–16). The years from 2016 to 2021 were a time of interim leadership and reflection. In 2021, FBCY called Pastor Tim Evans as their new pastor.

FBCY pastors and laity have been highly involved in many community and civic organizations. Reverend Bingham was instrumental in starting Ypsilanti Meals on Wheels, and the church continues to be the home of this organization. Currently, church members support and serve with YMOW, Habitat for Humanity, The Hope Clinic, SOS, Friends in Deed, Kiwanis, the Thrift Shop, and many other organizations. The church has also presented The Living Nativity for the community since 1976.

FBCY is currently home to many community organizations. These include Mosaic Church, Young Life, Daughters of the American Revolution, Jewish Family Services, Community Theater Groups, and others as space is requested.

FBCY desires to be a people who demonstrate their love for God by loving and serving their community.

Contributed by Pastor Tim Evans

St. John the Baptist Catholic Church, 411 Florence

The first Catholic place of worship in Ypsilanti was a wooden frame structure built in the 1840s on Ballard Street. By the 1850s, St. John's had outgrown this wood frame church, and a new brick church was constructed on an adjacent lot that was dedicated to St. John the Baptist in 1858. In 1862, an adjacent lot was purchased on Cross Street on which a rectory was built which remained in use until 1932.

The cornerstone for the present church was laid in 1932 on the corner of Cross and North Hamilton Streets. At the time, the parish of St. John numbered 360 families. It was during the early Depression, and St. John the Baptist Catholic Church may have been the only building of significance built in southern Michigan during that time period.

Shortly after the end of World War II, the size of St. John's congregation increased to more than one thousand families. Major efforts were undertaken to expand the parish's educational programs, including the construction of a new high school on Packard Road.

The latest major renovation involved the construction of a two-story gathering space (4,200 square feet on each floor) which linked the main church to the Activities Center (former school building) and made the entire facility interconnected and barrier-free.

In the last few years, the congregations of Transfiguration and Holy Trinity were merged with the St. John Parish, and current membership includes more than 800 families.

Father Dan Westerman is our current pastor.

Contributed by Pastor Dan Westerman

St. Luke's Episcopal Church, 120 North Huron

In the last fifty years, St. Luke's has had only three rectors. Fr. Sidney Rood passed away in 1982 after nearly twenty-five years of service. He was followed by Fr. Jasper Pennington (1983–2000), the Rev. JoAnn Kennedy Slater (2006–22), and now, our interim rector, Rev. Beth Scriven.

The church has been active with the Ypsilanti area CROP Walk since it began in 1998, helping with dinners at Emanuel Lutheran Church (under the umbrella of Ypsilanti Hunger Coalition), and Hope Clinic. Other community activities include EMU food pantry support and Ypsi Youth Theatre.

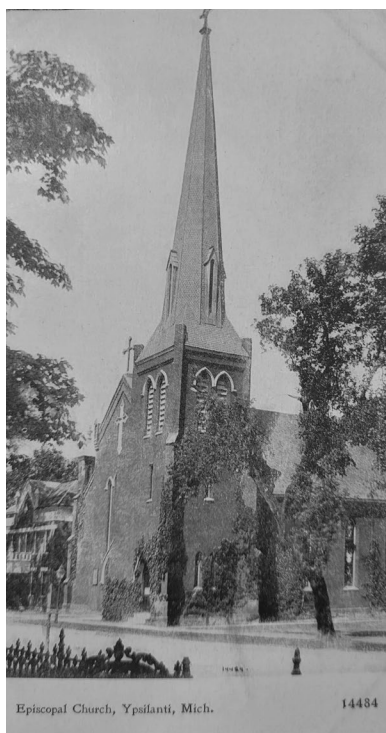
The Ypsilanti Heritage Festival gave us a chance to open our doors for guided tours and displays, plus several years of delightful high teas and Edwardian fashions and wedding gowns (courtesy of Grace Cornish). We also have been part of the First Friday musical events, several community organ-choir concerts, and the New Year's Eve Jubilees.

Music is an important aspect of the Sunday service. The three choir directors who served the longest are Alice Van Wambeke, Mary Ann Balduf, and Marijim Thoene.

In 1991, The "Good Shepherd" ceramic mural by Jane McAllister Dart was placed



St. John the Baptist Catholic Church, 2022



St. Luke's Episcopal Church, c. 1910

in the garth. In 2014, the Pease stained-glass window was lent to Eastern Michigan University for display at Pease Auditorium.

Contributed by Marcia McCrary

Emmanuel Lutheran Church, 201 North River

Emmanuel Lutheran Church was formed in 1859 and has been a pillar of Ypsilanti for more than 162 years. Founded by German immigrants, Emmanuel has made God's love known beyond the walls of the church. For decades, Ypsilanti residents have benefitted from Emmanuel's diverse social ministries such as warm meals, the food pantry, free clothing giveaways, the annual Christmas Giveaway, and medical loan closet. Emmanuel continually works with other local non-profits such as SOS, Food Gatherers, and Hope Clinic to help eliminate food insecurity in the area. The church's leadership has partnered with Washt-

enaw County's "Partners for Clean Streams" program, to design rain gardens and plant native flowers and grasses along church property that runs along the Huron River.

In 2023, Emmanuel celebrates its 100th anniversary in the current building, a large limestone structure on River Street, just down the road from Depot Town. The current pastor, Pastor Alex Clark, has served the congregation since 2018. If you are in Depot Town, stop on by!

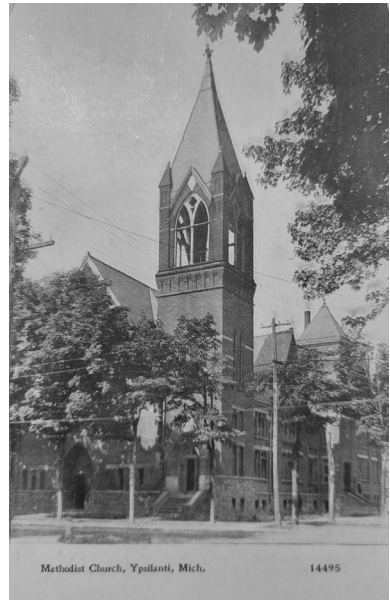
Contributed by Pastor Alex Clark

First United Methodist Church, 209 Washtenaw

Methodism was officially established in Ypsilanti when Rev. Elias Pattee organized a society, the precursor to a chartered church congregation, in May or June 1825. In the 1830s, the small congregation built its first chapel on River Street. In March 1843, during a revival service, the floor of the chapel collapsed, the wood stove fell over, and the building was lost to fire. Construction on a new church began immediately. The congregation grew and thrived on our current site until a larger church was needed.

The current sanctuary was consecrated and became the home of the Methodist Episcopal Church of Ypsilanti in 1892. The Akron style of architecture, popular in the late nineteenth century, was designed by Weary and Kramer and gave each person present a view of the pulpit and choir. The stained-glass windows that adorn the east, north, and south sides of the sanctuary still provide a colorful backdrop to those who choose to spend time in praise and prayer. We remain a congregation that welcomes everyone as God created them. We encourage openness in thought and expression as we profess the gift of grace that God offers to each of us.

Contributed by Pastor Dr. Donald Ferris-McCann



**First United Methodist Church,
c. 1910**

First Presbyterian Church, 300 North Washington

First Presbyterian Church of Ypsilanti began as a Bible study group in 1825, was chartered with the State in 1829, and called its first pastor, the Rev. Ira Weed, in 1832. Today, that church maintains an active presence in the community with weekly worship, study, formation, local and global aid, and mission.

In recent years, the congregation began several active ministries. In 2008, the church partnered with Open Door Detroit and Westminster Presbyterian Church of Ann Arbor to create the Riverside Community Meal, a hot, nutritious meal served around common tables every Wednesday to anyone in need. In 2009, with the refurbishment and expansion of the sanctuary pipe organ, the Ypsilanti Organ Festival was created. It sponsors three concerts a season, often partnering with the University of Michigan Organ Department and the Ann Arbor chapter of the American Guild of Organists. Performers are local students, national, and international artists.

Other community groups supported by the church include: the Boy Scouts of America, weekly recovery groups since 1948, Friends-In-Deed, the Hope Clinic, Meals-on-Wheels, and SOS Crises Housing. Local and global Christian ministries served include: UKirk Campus Ministry at EMU; along the U.S.-Mexican border in Douglas, AZ; Tokyo; and China.

Contributed by Rev. Keith Geiselman, Pastor

Behind the Furnace

The History and Development of the Ypsilanti Historic District and Commission

BY JANE BIRD SCHMIEDEKE

Remember Ypsilanti fifty years ago?

Remember how downtown looked with false facades on nearly every building?

Remember how Depot Town was a real eyesore?

Fast forward to 2000 when the Michigan Historic Preservation Network granted its prestigious Government Award to the City of Ypsilanti. The criteria for this particular award reads as follows: "This award is given to cities, agencies or institutions that by their actions have accomplished significant positive changes in the historic preservation climate and activity in the State of Michigan."

The City of Ypsilanti was nominated for that award in recognition and appreciation of all the city officials, past and present, who made Ypsilanti's journey to historic preservation possible.

The nomination told the story of Ypsilanti's journey. It began years earlier when there was little appreciation of the city's wealth of historic architecture and no understanding at all of historic preservation, and continued through the years of growing awareness to the full and committed support that city government gives to preservation today.

Strong support of the nomination came from some important sources. Jane Busch from the Michigan State Historic Preservation Office in Lansing said that she supported the nomination "in recognition of Ypsilanti's long and exemplary historic preservation program." Louisa Pieper, the Historic Preservation Coordinator for the City of Ann Arbor, said: "I can't think of any city in our fair state that deserves this award more." Lis Knibbe, historic preservation architect and former member of the Ypsilanti Historic District Commission, spoke to the city's "consistent backing for and support for private and public investment in historic preservation." Monika Sacks, former Ypsilanti Assis-

tant City Attorney, emphasized the statewide reputation the city enjoys for its strong support of preservation.

The nomination closed by stating: "Never was a city more deserving of recognition for its accomplishments in, and its contributions to, historic preservation."

So, how did we get from the disastrous 1960s to being worthy of that prestigious award?

In the Beginning

Let's look at how historic preservation started in Ypsilanti and how it works.

The 1800s saw the fairly astonishing growth of the small town on the Huron River. Ypsilanti's prosperous milling, farming, and railroading economy supported the construction of a great many architecturally significant buildings, both commercial and residential. Most of those structures remain today and, because of their significance, are now protected by the Ypsilanti Historic District Ordinance.

Ypsilanti is blessed with a wealth of American architectural styles including Greek Revival, Gothic Revival, Italianate, Second Empire, Queen Anne, Tudor Revival, and even Prairie. Huron Street, the major entrance to the city from I-94, is a veritable parade of American architectural styles.

But little attention was paid to this treasure trove of historic architecture until the 1970s, when historic preservation slowly gained acceptance, was given legal status, and eventually became an essential element of city planning and administration.

Things Began to Happen

It all started in 1970 when the State of Michigan, having determined the value of protecting entire historic areas and having determined that only the creation of a historic district could halt the piecemeal destruction of such areas, passed enabling legislation which allows Michigan communities to establish historic districts, pass an ordinance to protect those districts, and appoint historic district commissions to administer those ordinances.

In June 1972, under the provisions of that enabling legislation, the Ypsilanti City Council appointed the Historic District Study Committee to survey the city, lay out the area of a possible historic district, document that area with photos, determine the feasibility of establishing a district, draft an ordinance, and submit its report to city council for adoption or rejection.

There were people on that committee whose names may be familiar to some of you: Nathalie Edmunds, Foster Fletcher, Mattie Dorsey, Dottie Disbrow, Lyndle Bullard, Robert Fink, Ken Massingill, Ward Swarts who surveyed the city, Eileen Harrison who took the photos, and Jane Bird who chaired the committee and wrote the ordinance.

In December 1972, the Study Committee submitted its final report to city council.

It recommended the establishment of a historic district and included a draft ordinance. The committee requested only the designation of the district but not the passage of the ordinance because there were not enough yes votes on council. Had the ordinance been submitted and failed, study committee would have been put out of business.

Two months later, in February 1973, City Council designated the Ypsilanti Historic District. It was a good first step, but it was only a line on the map. There was no ordinance.

In the seemingly endless six years that followed, preservation proponents counted votes after every council election, spoke to anyone who would stand still, and were heartened when the Ypsilanti Historic District was placed on State Register of Historic Places in 1973 and on the National Register in 1977. These designations were a huge honor, but they offered no protection to our historic architecture. Only a local ordinance could do that.

Then, in January 1978, the ordinance was passed by city council unanimously! The only citizen to speak against it was a slum landlord. Council's action served to put the ordinance into immediate effect and created the Historic District Commission (HDC). As a result, approximately 40 city blocks and 986 structures (including 305 outbuildings) in downtown Ypsilanti and Depot Town and adjacent residential neighborhoods, were now legally protected.

Off and Running

In February 1978, Ypsilanti Historic District Commission held its first meeting in the old city hall inside a very small room behind the furnace. In one of its first items of business, the HDC received a request from the historic East Side (Maple, Oak, Prospect area) neighborhood to be added to the historic district. This annexation increased the size of the district by almost fifty percent.

The next year, the ordinance was certified by the U.S. Secretary of the Interior and the HDC adopted, as policy, the Secretary of the Interior's Guidelines for Rehabbing Historic Buildings.

In 1980, four individual properties were designated as landmarks under the ordinance and, although they were all outside the district boundaries, their designation as landmarks brought them under the protection of the ordinance. These properties are the AME Brown Chapel on South Adams Street, First Ward (or Adams) School also on South Adams, the Water Tower, and the Stachlewitz house at 601 West Forest.

All Was Not Well, However

In 1983, the National Bank's application to replace its old false façade with a new false façade was denied by the HDC. The Chamber of Commerce and downtown business interests launched a full-scale effort to place a moratorium on HDC in the downtown area, make compliance voluntary in the area, remove the National Bank from the

Historic District, remove the downtown from the district, and/or abolish the ordinance altogether.

The pressure on the Ypsilanti City Council was relentless and the battle raged for months until council ultimately, and courageously, told the bank to follow the rules like everybody else.

That crisis was truly a watershed event for historic preservation in Ypsilanti. The city government had effectively said “this is the way we operate.”

Slowly, but steadily, city officials began to more fully understand preservation, to realize what it could mean for the revitalization of the city, and to give it the support it needed in order to become effective.

This Is How It Works

The Ypsilanti Historic District Commission consists of seven people appointed by the mayor with the concurrence of city council. All seven must live within the city limits and at least two members must live in the district. Membership must include also an architect or a builder with a known interest in historic preservation.

By ordinance, the HDC is required to meet once a month. However, from the beginning, it has met twice a month in order to handle the work load.

A property owner who wishes to work on his/her structure makes application for a building permit and for HDC review; no work can begin until HDC approves the application.

The commission reviews all applications for exterior work or work that will have an exterior effect. It is the responsibility of the HDC to ensure that any changes to a struc-



Historic District Commission meeting, c. 1995

ture are appropriate to that structure and to the District as a whole.

HDC does not operate arbitrarily. Its decisions are guided by the local ordinance, its own design standards, and the guideline of the U.S. Secretary of the Interior.

Commission meetings are informal work sessions with two kinds of agenda items: study items which allow for early discussion of the proposed work, and action items which result in a vote by HDC.

The same restrictions apply to everyone and ensure that changes in the neighborhood protect the property values of every property owner.

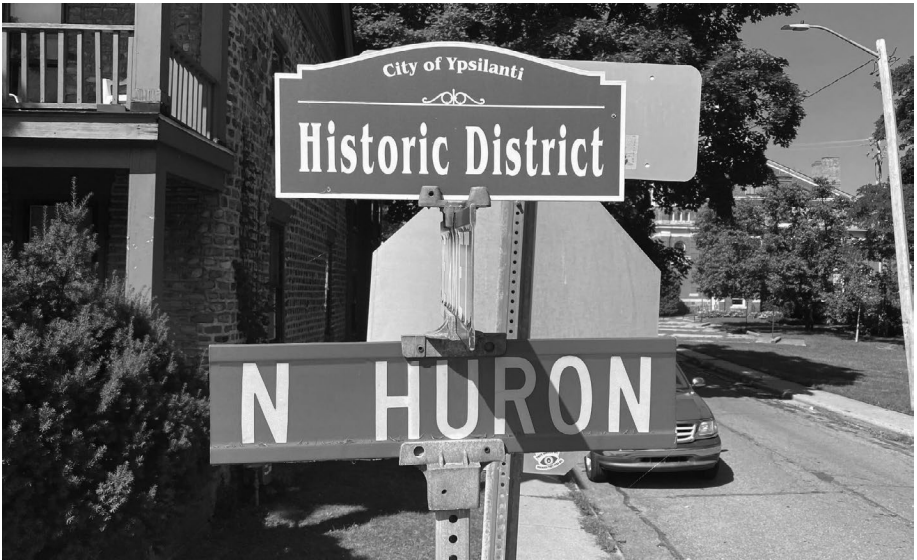
And So We Continue

Today, the Ypsilanti Historic District Commission continues to meet twice a month, much as it has for the last forty-four years.

In 2005, the Starkweather Historic District was established to protect the c.1840 Greek Revival house at 1266 Huron River Drive.

There are problems. There always will be problems with the conflicting opinions of those who resist any kind of restriction, with inappropriate proposals, with crises like the National Bank, and with appeals. HDC decisions have been appealed at least three times to the Historic Preservation Review Board in Lansing, and each time, the HDC's decisions have been upheld.

There are difficulties. It's not an easy job—commissioners need enthusiasm, dedication, special skills, and consistency. They must be able to derive satisfaction from accomplishment without expecting credit, withstand criticism, and face the threat of a lawsuit



Historic District signage

without caving in or making a poor decision.

But it works. The ordinance serves us well and has often been a model for other communities. The Ypsilanti Historic Commission continues to be staffed by qualified and dedicated people, the city now employs a professional preservation planner, and HDC no longer meets behind the furnace.

A Note on Sources

Information for this essay was taken from the author's February 2004 presentation to the Ypsilanti Historical Society. All photographs are from the Ypsilanti Historical Society Archives.

About the Author

Jane Bird Schmiedeke served as Chair of the Study Committee, wrote the Study Committee report and the Ordinance, and served as Chair of the Historic District Commission for over thirty years.

The Ypsilanti Heritage Foundation

October 1974 to the Present

BY PENNY SCHREIBER AND PAUL SCHREIBER

Love at First Sight

In 1985, we were looking for a house larger than our two-bedroom Ann Arbor condominium. A friend suggested we consider a house in Ypsilanti that was about to go on the market in the Woods Road Subdivision where she lived with her husband. We fell in love at first sight with the 1938 Colonial Revival at 922 Pleasant Drive, and thirty-seven years later, the two of us are still in awe that we get to call this beautiful architect-designed house our home.

Before we moved in with our young son and daughter, our real estate agent made the excellent suggestion that we hire a fellow named Don Randazzo to inspect the house. Don, who at the time was a restoration carpenter for Greenfield Village, was also an excellent house inspector. Little did we realize that we had met one of the founding members of the Ypsilanti Heritage Foundation.

Not long after we moved in, Don invited his friend Jane Van Bolt over to meet us and see the house, wondering if it might be a home tour prospect. Jane and Don were both Ypsilanti Heritage Foundation (YHF) board members, and Jane chaired the home tour committee. Soon we were attending YHF bi-monthly presentations on historic preservation and related topics. Penny became a fixture on the home tour committee and eventually president of the YHF. Paul developed an interest in architecture and the amazing and varied architectural styles lining the streets of Ypsilanti. For us, preservation of historic architecture through the YHF was a worthwhile cause. But most important, we also made friends for life.

The City Evolves

Longtime YHF member Bill Nickels divides the city of Ypsilanti into three historical periods. The first stretched from the city's founding in 1823 to 1939. Ypsilanti was then

a quiet college town, its prosperity fueled by successful small industries. For a town its size, Ypsilanti had an unusual wealth of architecturally interesting buildings and houses representing almost every American architectural style: Greek Revival, Colonial Revival, Prairie Style, the bungalow, Queen Anne, Gothic Revival, and Italianate, among many others.

Bill refers to the years 1941 to 1973 as the Bomber Plant era. Factory workers poured into Ypsilanti during the war, dramatically altering the community. During these years, property owners milked their properties for all the profits they could squeeze out of them. These owners showed little concern for zoning or maintenance.

The era from 1973 to the present, according to Bill, has been the Jane Bird Schmiedeke and Nathalie Edmunds era. Together, these two women changed the city. In the 1960s, Depot Town was frequented by motorcycle gangs, specializing in violence and crime. All of Depot Town was on the market for \$14,000. According to Jane, Ypsilanti had hit rock bottom.



130 North Huron Street, 2021

By the early 1970s, the city was planning to remake itself. To increase its tax base, Ypsilanti drafted a master plan that included razing Depot Town and replacing its buildings with light industry. Riverside Park was going to become a parking lot. An Ann Arbor developer was planning to tear down the many buildings he owned on or near North Huron Street to build a civic center and a

county building, and there was talk of a senior citizen high rise. By the mid-1970s, the county had begun planning a major highway through Depot Town. Nathalie Edmunds remembered what ensued as “one continual battle” to save North Huron Street and Depot Town. The late Jack Harris referred to the now-restored houses on North Huron as “living architectural history.”

Historic Preservation: The Beginnings

The historic preservation movement in Ypsilanti really began around 1969, when the State of Michigan passed enabling legislation for the creation of historic districts. Shortly thereafter, city council member Nathalie Edmunds gathered a committee to study the feasibility of creating a historic district in Ypsilanti. After researching sixteen historic

districts throughout the country, including Savannah, Annapolis, and New York City, Jane Bird Schmiedeke wrote the historic district ordinance that now protects Ypsilanti's historic houses and buildings.

Schmiedeke recalls that whatever their size or location, all sixteen districts took the same approach, basing their local ordinances on the Supreme Court's ruling that preservation is a legitimate public purpose and that governmental units are within their rights to regulate what can be done to historic buildings. Most important is that Jane wrote a damn good ordinance. She added restrictions; she put teeth in it. People fought those restrictions, but Jane prevailed. Ypsilanti's historic district came into being by Ypsilanti city ordinance in 1978, and today it is on the National Register of Historic Places.

Towner House

The 1837 Greek Revival Towner House at 303 North Huron Street is the oldest wooden structure on its original foundation in Ypsilanti. Learning that the Presbyterian Church, the owner of the Towner House, was considering demolishing it, Schmiedeke and Edmunds asked the church if they would allow an outside group to maintain it. When the church agreed, Jane and Nathalie decided to form such a group for the purpose of maintaining the Towner House. This group, as they conceived it, would also be dedicated to the preservation of historic properties in the city. The Towner House became Exhibit A of historic preservation in Ypsilanti.

A group of prominent Ypsilanti citizens, including Schmiedeke and Edmunds,



837 Greek Revival Towner House, 303 North Huron Street, 2021



Jane Bird Schmiedeke and Nathalie Edmunds at the Celebration of Women, 2005

formed the Ypsilanti Heritage Foundation in October 1974. Its mission was to encourage preservation of historic architecture throughout the city.

The core of that original group became Schmiedeke, Edmunds, and Don Randazzo. Over the years, dedicated board members have included Hank Prebys, Joe Mattimoe, Jane Van Bolt, Paul Schreiber, Penny Schreiber, Bill Nickels, Jan Arps-Prundeanu, Jack Harris (who edited a delightfully quirky YHF newsletter), and many others. For example, the late architect Denis Schmiedeke created an architectural guide to historic properties

in the city, and he put together the programs for and led the architectural discussion at the YHF's annual Marker Awards Banquet. All were knowledgeable and passionate adherents of historic preservation and made immeasurable contributions over the years.

Historic Homes Tour

In 1978, the first in-home house tour was held to showcase the east-side historic homes that were to be added to the Ypsilanti Historic District. Over the years, approximately 180 homes and businesses in Ypsilanti have been featured on the annual home tour. Proceeds from the tour have enabled the YHF to donate money to many historic preservation projects, totaling approximately \$55,000.

Marker Awards

In addition to supporting preservation projects throughout the city, the Ypsilanti Heritage Foundation encourages historic preservation by presenting historic-structure markers to the owners of buildings and houses that are preserving their exteriors in keeping with their original architectural style. The first YHF Historic Structure Markers were awarded in 1976. Since then, at least 270 buildings have been recognized. Of these, more than 100 homes and businesses were featured on the YHF home tour at least once.

The YHF Historic Structure Markers showcase the preservation and rehabilitation efforts of the owners of both large mansions and small homes. Notable examples of derelict buildings that have been brought back to life are the Gilbert Mansion, at 227

North Grove, and the Thompson Block in Depot Town, at 400 North River. Others, such as the simple Craftsman house at 913 North Congress, have benefited from the loving care and attention of their owners. Almost every one of Ypsilanti's architectural styles has been recognized by at least one marker.

The popular annual home tour was put on hold during the COVID-19 pandemic, but Historic Structure Markers continued to be awarded. The Towner house is now owned by the Towner House Foundation, with funding from the YHF. In 2023, the Towner House interior continues under renovation by Don Randazzo and John Harrington. Along with many other property owners throughout the city, they continue the work of historic preservation begun in the mid-1970s.

Historic preservation remains a hallmark of the city of Ypsilanti, and it was made possible through the efforts of Jane Bird Schmiedeke, Nathalie Edmunds, Don Randazzo, and the members of the Ypsilanti Heritage Foundation. We can't thank them enough.

A Note on Sources

Some of the information for this essay comes from the Ypsilanti Heritage Foundation newsletters and website. For more about the architecture of Ypsilanti and efforts to preserve it, go to: https://yhf.org/?page_id=1101. All photographs are by the authors.

About the Authors

Retired electronics engineer Paul Schreiber was mayor of Ypsilanti for eight years, from 2006 to 2014. Prior to running for mayor, Paul served on the Ypsilanti Housing Commission for ten years. He is currently president of the Ypsilanti Heritage Foundation. Penny Schreiber is a retired editor, journalist, and book editor. She was managing editor of the *Ann Arbor Observer* for twelve years. She is a past president of the Ladies' Literary Club of Ypsilanti, volunteered for the University Musical Society Ambassadors for eleven years, and she served on the University of Michigan Wallenberg Committee, from 2001 to 2020.

Preserving the Past

The Ypsilanti Historical Society

BY BILL NICKELS

Introduction

I came to Ypsilanti in 1959 to attend Eastern Michigan University and subsequently married an Ypsi girl. We bought our first house at the same time that plans were being developed for the 1973 sesquicentennial celebration and Ypsilanti's historic buildings were being noticed. We learned that the Hemphill Street house we'd bought was a Dutch Colonial and that Ypsilanti was a veritable museum of nineteenth- and twentieth-century houses. Learning Ypsilanti's architectural history went hand in hand with learning our community's history. Following is how the Ypsilanti Historical Society (YHS) became the keeper of our local history.

Our History Is Saved

The Northwest Territory was established in 1787. Thirty-six years into our country's expansion westward, in 1823, Ypsilanti was founded. In 1923, Ypsilanti acknowledged its one hundred years of history during a centennial celebration. Participating in the 1923 historical pageant probably inspired Louis White who, right after the pageant, developed a lifelong passion of keeping Ypsilanti-related written documents and visiting local cemeteries to collect genealogical information.

In 1957, the State of Michigan passed Public Act 213, which authorized local governing bodies to "raise and appropriate money" and help with "any activity or project which...tends to advance historical interests of the community." On January 19, 1960, Louis White asked the Ypsilanti City Council to form a history-based city commission. Council then directed Mayor Rodney Hutchinson to appoint a history commission that would report to council. On February 2, 1960, the commission met, with Mayor Hutchinson as chair. Next, a subcommittee submitted a plan to establish a historical committee and the position of city historian. Council appointed members to this

committee and confirmed Louis White as Ypsilanti's first city historian in April 1960.

Michigan was founded in 1837, and it took the state more than one hundred years to encourage its residents to keep records of its history. It also took about hundred years of Ypsilanti history for Louis White to start what would eventually become the Ypsilanti Historical Society (YHS). On September 26, 1960, the historical committee met with the purpose of planning for a historical society to support them. On October 10, 1960, the historical committee created the YHS.

On January 26, 1961, the first regular meeting of YHS convened, and members elected its first set of officers. Foster Fletcher, owner of the Ypsilanti Credit Bureau, was elected the first president.

In 1962, Louis White moved his 30,000 notecards and armloads of old history books from his home to four small rooms in the Municipal Court Building, located at 206 North Huron. There, he was able to start cataloging his information. Over time, Louis White collected more than 1500 Ypsilanti area photos, which became the foundation of YHS's present day photo archives. After Louis died in 1963, Foster Fletcher became Ypsilanti's second city historian.

The Future in Its Past

From the start, the museum and archive collections were assembled by donations. In the early 1960s, Lillian Bradley donated the Asher Aray collection. Asher Aray (1806–71) was a prosperous Black farmer living on a Michigan Avenue farm west of Carpenter Road. His donated collection revealed his wealth and participation in the Underground Railroad. The collection is an important piece of local and national history.

On March 19, 1963, in what appeared to be a minor YHS decision, Nathalie "Nat" and Dr. William "Bill" Edmunds were appointed as greeters for future YHS meetings. Independently, Nat and Bill would go on to use the city's history to promote Ypsilanti in many different ways.

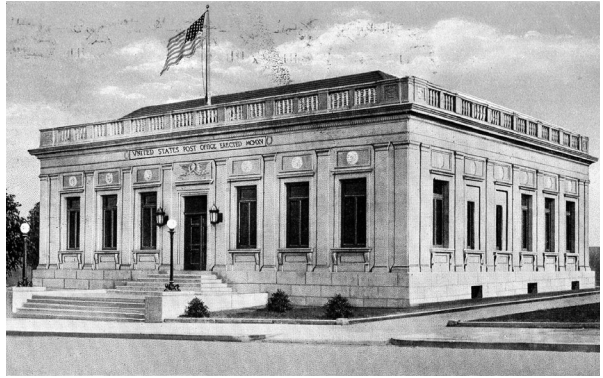
Dr. Bradley Harris was elected YHS's second president on January 30, 1964. At the same meeting, Dr. William Edmunds urged members to attend a meeting on February 13 to start planning for Ypsilanti's sesquicentennial celebration in 1973. The planning group was called Project 73. At a local community meeting, Dr. Edmunds was quoted as saying, "The future of Ypsilanti is in its past."

On January 28, 1965, Mrs. Carl Miller (Phoebe) became YHS's third president. In November 1965, YHS presented the Ladies Literary Club with a historical marker to be placed on their clubhouse. That was the first such marker in Ypsilanti.

During the 1960s, the City of Ypsilanti acquired ownership of the buildings on North Huron Street above Riverside Park. The accumulated properties were approved for demolition and offered to developers to build a shopping mall. Residents were opposed to this idea, and, thankfully, it never came to fruition. One of the buildings that

was spared demolition was Ypsilanti's public library, the Ladies Library, at 130 North Huron. The library subsequently moved to the newly vacated post office on Michigan Avenue. The new library on Michigan Avenue had room in their basement to allow YHS to assemble a historical museum. Ypsilanti had their first historical museum in 1966!

The Ladies Library had prominently displayed a grand Tiffany window, originally commissioned and installed by Mary Ann Starkweather. To protect



The first Ypsilanti Historical Society museum

the window, the city had it removed and displayed in the new historical museum.

John Elwell was elected YHS president in 1967, Shirley Pio followed as president in 1969, and Dr. William Edmunds became YHS president in 1969.

220 North Huron

City Historian Foster Fletcher urged the City of Ypsilanti to allow YHS to use the Dow House at 220 North Huron as a new location for the YHS Historical Museum. In March 1970, YHS requested a twenty-five-year lease; the City of Ypsilanti limited the lease to renewable one-year leases because of "the potential for development." With the house having previously been broken up into apartments, Dr. Edmunds and his family led the conversion of the building into a museum, with the goal of having it ready for opening on August 13, 1972.

Eileen Harrison was elected president of the YHS in May 1970, and Allan Stewart was elected president in 1972.

YHS planned special events for every month of the 1973 sesquicentennial year. They included chair caning, needlepointing, quilting, candle making, Easter egg decorating, and bobbin lace making. During the July 1973 celebration, the museum was kept open from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. daily. Keeping the first hundred years of Ypsi's history alive, YHS had the centennial's *Story of Ypsilanti* publication, by Harvey C. Colburn, reprinted and available for purchase during the sesquicentennial. On the business side, YHS was granted tax exempt status by the IRS in 1973.

Mrs. Bradley Harris and Dr. William Edmunds served as YHS presidents in 1974, Elizabeth Warren was elected president in 1975, and Carl Scheffler became president in 1976.



220 North Huron

Many years earlier, in 1905, Adelaide Lewis, a widow and mother of six children, had purchased the home at 415 North Huron. Her second child, Evangeline Lewis, lived in the house until she decided to move into the Gilbert Residence, an assisted living community. Having no heirs, Evangeline first thought of deeding her house to YHS but changed her mind and offered it to Eastern Michigan University. EMU updated the kitchen, built a fence, and did general maintenance on the house. After all that investment, EMU changed its mind and suggested that YHS might again be interested in the house. In January 1977, YHS agreed to accept the house. The gift eventually was considered too much to manage, and YHS sold the house in 1989.

Ann McCarthy became YHS president in 1981, LaVerne Howard in 1982, and David Gauntlett in 1983. In 1985, the City of Ypsilanti made the members of their Historical Commission the same as the officers of YHS. The Historical Commission accomplished the goal of 1957's Public Act 213 as it "advanced the historical interests of Ypsilanti." The Historical Commission and the position of city historian were later removed from Ypsilanti's governmental structure with a new city charter.

Jack Miller was elected president in 1988, Peter Fletcher in 1990, Robert Fink in 1992, and Charles Kettles in 1993.

YHS was the recipient of a three bequests: a monetary gift from Frances Warren; the donation of a Saline house by Michael and Candace Marino; and another monetary

gift from Elizabeth Tunnieliff. Tunnieliff stipulated that her donation be used to create a children's display room, which became a favorite of youthful visitors. Peter Fletcher was president in 1996 and managed the money from these financial gifts and the earlier sale of the Lewis House. He kept the funds separate from the annual income and expenses. Bill Edmunds became president in 1998 and Michael Miller in 1999.

Another very important donor was Florence Babbitt, who was born in 1847, was married to Judge John Babbitt, and died in 1929. As a child, she had started collecting Ypsilanti artifacts and ultimately became known as Ypsilanti's best collector of memorabilia. Eastern Michigan University came into ownership of her collection, and in 1999, YHS sought to acquire it. The request was granted, and the items were permanently lent to YHS. They have become an important part of the YHF collection.

Major Step Forward

Joan Carpenter became president in 2000, and Al Rudisill in 2004. Al was an organizational expert and was the right president for the time. During the next fourteen years, he led YHS in the major structural changes that elevated the professionalism of the museum and archives.

With a change in Michigan's tax structure, local governments such as Ypsilanti found themselves short of money. When that happened, the State of Michigan sometimes assigned financial managers to local governments. The powers of the financial managers superseded the powers of mayors and city councils, and these managers could do what was necessary to keep local governments solvent. YHS became concerned that Ypsilanti might be assigned a financial manager who would sell 220 North Huron to raise cash. It was time to purchase the property.

In 2006, with the generosity of members and YHS's investment account managed by Peter Fletcher, the society secured the future of the museum by purchasing the house at 220 North Huron. The price was \$250,000: \$125,000 down and \$125,000 in ten years. YHS was the beneficiary of two more trusts: the Doris Milliman Trust in 2002 and the Dolf and Anne Thorne Trust in 2006.

In addition to these gifts and donations, members of the YHS sought to raise funds themselves. Starting in 2001, YHS solicited household items to be sold in what became the YHS Annual Garage Sale, held as part of the Normal Park Neighborhood Garage Sale. Over the years, income from the sale ranged from about \$1,000 to as much as \$6,000 for a day of hard work. The sale continues to this day. For several years, YHS members also participated in State of Michigan-approved charitable gaming, which earned many thousands of dollars per session.

The professionalism of local historical museums is often limited by the leadership of nonprofessional volunteers. President Rudisill recognized that and entered into an agreement with Eastern Michigan University President Susan Martin whereby two

EMU Historic Preservation Program graduate students are hired, with the cost shared by EMU and YHS. The graduate students bring the expertise they learn in their classrooms to the YHS museum and archives, and they also gain valuable experience for their own future careers.

When the City of Ypsilanti had owned the building at 220 North Huron, city services always had priority over the maintenance of the building. Acquiring the property and its adjacent carriage house meant serious maintenance costs for the YHS.



220 North Huron's Carriage House

The main floor of the carriage house was then occupied by YHS's archives. It was decided to remodel the basement of 220 North Huron to accommodate the archives, thereby creating a rental apartment in the carriage house. That meant adding a bathroom to the basement and building an archives entrance addition with a lift to provide direct access to the new archives for all. This move was accomplished in 2007.

In 2008, the carriage house was remodeled and updated for two new rentals that would generate income for the operation of both the museum and archives.

Mary Ann Starkweather's Tiffany window had previously been moved from Michigan Avenue to the museum. It sat in an upstairs room with weakened lead joints that allowed the stained glass sections to squash like an accordion. YHS entered into a 2007 Trust Agreement with the City of Ypsilanti whereby YHS became responsible for maintaining and exhibiting the window. Denis Schmiedeke designed a display cabinet, which

Don Randazzo subsequently built and Ron Rupert stained and finished. All were professionals who volunteered their services.

In 2012, volunteer James Mann started his “Friday Night at the Movies,” showing old films in the Mae and Joe Butko Theater in the basement archives. The movies continue to this day. I was elected president in 2018 and still serve in this position.

For 2023, YHS will have available for sale their second reprint of the 1923 centennial publication, *The Story of Ypsilanti*. Along with the Ypsilanti Bicentennial Commission, YHS officers have also taken the lead in publishing *Ypsilanti Histories*, the 2023 bicentennial publication.

A Note on Sources

Some information for this essay comes from the author’s memories; most of it is from YHS Board of Trustee’s meeting agendas and minutes. All images are provided by the Ypsilanti Historical Society Archives.

About the Author

Bill Nickels is President of the Ypsilanti Historical Society and Professor Emeritus of Chemistry at Schoolcraft College. He served for ten years on the Ypsilanti Historic District Commission and twelve years on the Ypsilanti City Council (Ward 2). He is also a long-time member and past president of the Ypsilanti Heritage Foundation Board.

Curtains Up

The Creation of the Riverside Arts Center

BY BARRY LARUE AND KIM CLARKE

A Fine Tradition

The Ypsilanti community has a long history of supporting the arts. Venues such as the Follett House in Depot Town and downtown's Hewitt Hall hosted local and traveling shows in the mid-to-late nineteenth century. A fine opera house opened on Michigan Avenue and later became one of two movie theaters. The Masonic Temple also housed a substantial theatre space. The Ypsilanti Players, the third-oldest community theatre group in the country, operated for many years in the twentieth century.

Yet, in the early 1990s, Ypsilanti had no central space devoted to the arts. The stage was set for the Riverside Arts Center (RAC).

Seeking a Performance Space

It's hard to imagine how an abandoned Masonic Temple, a derelict car wash, and an empty utility building could evolve into a vibrant arts center in downtown Ypsilanti.

Starting in 1992, the Ypsilanti Downtown Development Authority (DDA) held a series of community conversations focused on revitalizing its downtown business district. It used psychographic data about Ypsilanti and the surrounding area to develop recommendations on how best to improve the central business district's economic vitality while encouraging Ypsilanti's ongoing historic preservation.

In the fall of 1992, local arts supporters tried to entice the Ark, a folk music venue in Ann Arbor, to relocate in Ypsilanti's former downtown Masonic Temple building, which had been empty since 1987. While the effort failed, it spurred discussions about whether the vacant temple building could fit into Ypsilanti's future. Two years of research, public meetings, and focus groups led to the recommendation that Ypsilanti would benefit from a downtown arts and entertainment district.

Two opportunities emerged simultaneously in 1994. First, the city purchased the



Riverside Arts Center

remains of Atomic Car Wash, a derelict facility located on the north side of the Masonic Temple building on North Huron Street. The facility, which had become an eyesore as an illegal “chop shop” for stolen automobiles, sat on land that had potential as a pedestrian link between Riverside Park and downtown Ypsilanti.

Second, the DDA targeted the 18,000-square-foot Masonic Temple building as a community arts center. Next came a series of community conversations, driven by DDA Chair Bill Kinley, about creating and supporting a multiuse arts facility. Volunteers drew up rough budgets and researched staffing and capital needs, leading to the overwhelming conclusion that Ypsilanti was ready for an arts center. On June 2, the DDA voted to purchase the building for \$290,000 from a private owner. It would be called the Riverside Arts Center and would serve as a venue for all manner of arts and educational organizations.

The DDA demolished the car wash and now owned the three-story temple building, making room for a parking lot, plaza, and connection between the downtown and neighboring park.

A Center for the Arts

While volunteers worked to clean, restore, and improve Riverside’s interior, others worked to file articles of incorporation for the Riverside Arts Center Foundation and obtain IRS tax-exempt status for the organization as a non-profit.

The first meeting of the Riverside Arts Center Foundation board took place on April 27, 1995. Bill Kinley and Jim Nelson were elected co-chairs with the following members: Fred Davis, George Goodman, Doug Harris, John Kirkendall, Ben Koerber, Barry LaRue, Ron Miller, Al Shelton, Larry Smith, and Cynthia Wilbanks.

The first order of business was to accept a \$10,000 award from the State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) for an architectural feasibility study. Over the years, many grants followed from SHPO and the Michigan Council for the Arts and Cultural Affairs. These grants have led to gallery improvements: walls, ceiling, lighting, and kitchen upgrades; interior and exterior painting; HVAC upgrades, handicap-accessible restrooms, ramps, and doorways; a new roof; refurbished and expanded dressing rooms for performers; and a dance studio/classroom complete with new ceiling, lighting and windows overlooking the plaza.

The Riverside Arts Center grew in 2005 when it expanded south into a vacant DTE Energy office on North Huron Street. A long-term lease of \$1 a year allowed for a new, two-story space that came to be known as the Off Center. It houses classroom and exhibition space, a spacious dance studio, and five artist studios.

In April 2022, the Riverside Arts Center took its most significant step ever: purchasing its home, the once-abandoned Masonic Temple, from the Downtown Development Authority. Between a generous grant from an area family foundation and donations from board members, the organization came to own both the building and the parking area.

Arts Programming

The real impact of the Riverside Arts Center has been its continuous programming that serves the community. It offers renters and patrons a 115-seat black box theater, a 3,000-square-foot gallery, a 2,000-square-foot professional dance studio, and three rehearsal studios.

Some 17,000 people visit the Riverside Arts Center annually (before the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic). Their engagement with the center contributes some \$672,000 to the local economy, based on 2017 calculations by the Ann Arbor Area Community Foundation.

The first public event—a fundraiser to support the Frog Island Jazz Festival—took place within two weeks of the DDA purchasing the building in 1994. It has been active ever since.

Programming through the years has been rich and diverse: theater performances, summer youth camps, dance recitals, and live music. The Riverside hosts writing workshops, swing dancing, yoga, tai chi, ballet, a twenty-four-hour film shootout, and art classes for learning-disabled youth. Over the years, the lower-level gallery has exhibited the works of countless artists and hosted their opening receptions. In winter, a portion of the Riverside has opened as a warming center for the homeless.

The RAC's resident theatre company, PTD Productions, has called Riverside home since 1995. The organization typically stages at least four productions a year and has presented such diverse titles as *Arsenic and Old Lace*, *Steel Magnolias*, *The Lion in Winter*, and *August: Osage County*.

Riverside users throughout the years provide an impressive palette of arts and educational organizations: Accelerate Dance Arts, Arbor Opera Theater, Center Stage Productions, Comic Opera Guild, DIYpsi, Do Better, Explorers Home School Association, Father Gabriel Richard High School, Funaach Academy of Dance, Horizon Performing Arts, IFFYpsi, Pencilpoint Theatreworks, Pittsfield Opera, Pure Dance Ensemble, Rasa Festival of Dance and Theater, Spinning Dot Theatre, Tableau Cadre, and TEDxYDL. In addition, the University of Michigan's acclaimed Penny Stamps Speaker Series and University Musical Society also partner with the Riverside.

An artist residency program launched in 2021 provides grant support and studio space for artists in all disciplines: music, dance, film, plastic arts, visual arts, drama, writing, architecture, and emerging disciplines.

Financial Support

Private and public resources sustain the Riverside Arts Center, which has been financially supported by many who believe in the power of the arts.

Ypsilanti couple Jim and Marla Gousseff, through their James W. and Marla J. Gousseff Fund, made bequests to establish an endowment supporting the mission of the Riverside. The Buhr Foundation of Ann Arbor has provided grants for capital improvements. The Sappi Paper Company awarded the Riverside and Eastern Michigan University funding to rebrand the organization and create new marketing materials.

Most significantly, an anonymous \$250,000 grant from an area family foundation in 2022 allowed the Riverside to purchase its building from the Ypsilanti DDA. It was the largest grant in the Riverside's twenty-five-year history. And individual donors through the years have given consistently and generously to advance the center.

Equally important has been financial support from the Ypsilanti Downtown Development Authority and the State of Michigan. A 2002 grant from the Michigan Department of Transportation to the City of Ypsilanti went toward creating a plaza between the Riverside and an adjacent parking lot. Known as the West Park Link, the project consisted of erecting a colonnade, decorative brick walks, an overlook, and stairs to Riverside Park.

A 2008 grant from the Michigan Economic Development Corporation (MEDC), coupled with funds raised by the Riverside and a modest loan from the Ypsilanti Downtown Development Authority, allowed for a \$549,000 connector linking the space between the main building and the DTE/Off Center.

As the Riverside approached its twenty-fifth anniversary, the State of Michigan



Volunteers after a Clean-up Day. Sitting (L to R): Barry LaRue, Bette Warren, and Bill Kinley. Standing (L to R): Zachery Schultz, Emily Tuesday, Akosua Dow, Cre Fuller, Linda Yohn, and Rick Katon (Photo by Sally McCracken)

awarded it a \$450,000 enhancement grant for improvements to the unfinished third floor of the center. The planned improvements will make the space usable for arts education and possible career development activities as well as life/safety upgrades generally.

Behind the Scenes

Over the years, the Riverside's operating model has morphed from being solely dependent on volunteers to employing a combination of paid professional staff and volunteers. Early volunteer gallery coordinators were Robin Remick and Dee Overly, joined by building managers such as Noemi Ybarra, Joe Tiboni, and Larry Newhouse. Executive Director Emily Tuesday, who served from 2017 to 2019 and returned in 2020–21 in an interim role, brought a new level of expertise and professionalism to manage the center. The Riverside's latest executive director, hired in 2022, is Liz Warren.

A volunteer board of directors governs the Riverside Arts Center. Since 1994 there have been five board chairs: Bill Kinley, Barry LaRue, Donald Loppnow, Akosua Dow, and Sandra Murchison. Board members come from all corners of the community, including arts professionals, educators, developers, and other professionals. Interns from the University of Michigan, including the Ross Business School Board Fellowship Program, and Eastern Michigan University also assist the Riverside.

The COVID-19 pandemic dramatically impacted the Riverside. The Board of Directors chose to furlough its three-person professional staff, dial back the building's utilities, and wait until it once again was safe to hold indoor events. While the building was closed, the organization could preserve its fund balance and be well-positioned to re-open. While visitor numbers remained below pre-pandemic levels by late 2022, the Riverside Arts Center is focused on its next twenty-five years of engaging and entertaining Ypsilanti and Washtenaw County.

A Note on Sources

Images are provided by the Riverside Arts Center.

About the Author

Barry LaRue was initially a member of the Board of Directors, Operations Board, and Facility Committee for Riverside Arts Center. After the Ops Board was dissolved, he was Board Chair for two years. Kim Clarke is a professional writer for the University of Michigan.

The Growth of Music in Ypsilanti

BY ERIC WALTERS

Introduction

Having grown up in Ypsilanti, I attended Ypsi Public Schools and Eastern Michigan University (EMU) and was involved with both of their music programs. As a string bass player, I have been afforded opportunities to perform regularly with four major musical ensembles that have been established in the last fifty years.

In 1969, I was in ninth grade and a string bass player in Barb Weiss's string program at West Junior High School when I met Lynn Cooper, who was teaching band there. A group of us would gather in Mr. Cooper's office almost every morning before school started, teasing him, kidding around, and generally being junior high school students with a teacher we liked. By mid-term, we were lobbying Mr. Cooper to let me into his concert band as a string bass player. He agreed to do that, and by the second semester of ninth grade, I was in both band and orchestra. Mr. Cooper later moved up to Ypsi High. I never played in concert band at that level, but I continued to play in the orchestra, still directed by Barb Weiss.

Years before the sesquicentennial, Ypsilanti Civic Orchestra collaborated with EMU's music department, allowing both the community and the school to provide a more robust orchestra than either could have done on their own. In the early 1970s, the Ypsilanti Civic-University Orchestra disbanded, and many of those players, including Mrs. Weiss, joined the Plymouth Symphony. The growth of EMU's Music Department allowed the university to have its own orchestra, thus it no longer need the adjunct players.

The Ypsilanti Community Band

Several years after I graduated from high school, Lynn Cooper decided that Ypsilanti needed a community band. He had been contacted by multiple alumni about doing this. Cooper and these former players formed the Ypsilanti Community Band in January 1979. For the years that Cooper directed this band, and for some years after, they met

and performed at Ypsilanti High School. The band grew in part because of the stability afforded by the close tie to the high school. My participation in this group came later.

The Ypsilanti Community Choir

In the spring of 1983, a flute player with the band, Denise Rae Zellner, was earning her master's degree in music at the University of Michigan. One requirement was that she conduct an ensemble as her final project. To fulfill this, she formed a choir from band members and their families for a performance. That performance turned into the Ypsilanti Community Choir, which incorporated in 1984.

Shortly after this, I got a call from Denise asking if I would play bass for the choir's upcoming concert. I remember going to a couple of rehearsals at the First Baptist Church. I didn't know many in the choir at that time, but I do remember getting a couple of looks from Phyllis Bogarin, their accompanist, who didn't like my pitch on a few occasions. I would grow quite fond of Phyllis over the years. She had a reliable ear that I grew to depend on once I was singing with the choir.

In 1996, I had to give up playing basketball every Thursday night. As soon as I announced that retirement, my wife, Lisa, immediately suggested we join the choir which she'd been wanting to do for some time. I agreed that it would be nice to do something like this together.

By the time we joined, the Ypsilanti Community Choir was rehearsing at Emmanuel Lutheran Church. I remember walking into that first rehearsal and thinking, "Am I a tenor or a bass?" I looked at the maybe ten men that were there and I noticed there were only three tenors. That decided it for me: I'd be a tenor. (Clearly I hadn't done all that much singing in a choir, and I guessed I could sing either part.) Denise said, "It's the bass player!" remembering me from their concert ten years earlier.

I sat down next to Bob Klaffke, and while that was just dumb luck, it turned out to be just what I should have done, as Bob has perfect pitch. With him singing in my left ear, I could generally stay out of Phyllis's doghouse.

The choir performed annual holiday and spring concerts, on Memorial Day at the Vietnam Veteran's observance, and at the Heritage Festival in Riverside Park. Since the passing of Denise Zellner in 2006, the choir has been led by Ariel Toews-Ricotta, with Maria Cimorelli as accompanist.

My Connection to YCB

I also met Wayne Jahnke at choir. It turned out that Wayne played trombone with the Ypsilanti Community Band (YCB) and, more importantly, with John Reeves' Riverside Big Band. Wayne explained that the RBB needed a steady bass player and that they rehearsed the hour before YCB at what was then West Middle School. This was irresistible to me. I'd be rehearsing in my old band and orchestra room!

Of course, the big band was a gateway to playing with the concert band. I mean, once I've hauled the bass to the venue and I've unbagged it, I might as well just stay on and play with that group, too.

By the time I joined that band, Lynn Cooper had moved on to the university level down in Kentucky, and the director was Dr. Jerry Robbins. Between Cooper and Robbins there had been three other conductors: Paul Stanifer, Dr. Charles Lee, and Ken Bowman, the retired band teacher for Lincoln High School and a charter member of YCB. He conducted till 1998. His wife, Mary, also sang with the choir, yet another connection between the two organizations.

For years the two community groups cooperated on a holiday concert, or rather, the band invited the choir to perform at their holiday concert. These concerts went on from about 1984 to 2012, when both groups had large enough followings that the only venue in town that could house the event was EMU's Pease Auditorium. The expense of that made it impractical to continue the holiday program.

The band played five regular season indoor concerts at various venues and three summer concerts, in Recreation and Candy Cane Parks and on the campuses of EMU and Washtenaw Community College (WCC), in addition to the Heritage Festival.

The Ypsilanti Symphony Orchestra

In August 1999, I got a call from Barb Weiss, my string teacher of many years and colleague in the Plymouth Symphony. She had been asked to join a new community orchestra that was forming, and she knew they were looking for bass players. I agreed to attend the first organizational meeting of the Ypsilanti Symphony Orchestra (YSO), at which I was elected to the board as their first vice president. I served one year as vice president, two years as president, and two more years as vice president. I did a lot of work trying to make the fledgling orchestra into a credible performer over those first five years.

In that five years the orchestra went from no budget to a budget of about \$45,000 annually. I'm really proud that we were able to fund the orchestra and start a scholarship that is still being given out today.

Initially, the YSO performed at Holy Trinity Chapel and then moved to WCC's Towsley Auditorium. They held four regular season performances and a fundraising concert in the spring. This spring concert exists today as their Memorial Day concert in Riverside Park.

It was through my membership in the YSO that I met Chris Balk and Ben Kessler. At the time, I didn't know they'd become important to me. Chris was acting as photographer for the orchestra (his wife was a cellist), and Ben was the principal trombone player.

The Depot Town Big Band

In 2011, Matt Balmer started the Depot Town Big Band. He was getting his master's

degree at EMU and the band was a project for his degree (a recurring theme for grad students in music). Matt was also playing in the YCB and asked me to join his big band. By this time the Riverside Big Band was no more, as John Reeves had moved on with his library of big band charts.

It was at one of my first rehearsals with this band that I reconnected with Chris and Ben. For two years Matt held rehearsals at the Alexander Music Building at Eastern. The band had a difficult time keeping to a regular schedule, and many players came and went. Matt's tenure ended with him getting his degree and taking a job out of state. He handed the band off to Chris, as band manager, and Ben, as band director.

Without an official connection to EMU, Chris had to find a new place for us to rehearse. It so happened that Lisa and I owned a commercial building in downtown Ypsilanti, right next door to Haab's Restaurant. As the first floor was vacant, it was an ideal location for the band to rehearse, starting in the fall of 2013. Often when Lisa and I would go to Haab's for a meal, Mike Kabat, Haab's owner, would mention hearing the band through the common wall.

The band continued to have problems with players showing up consistently for rehearsals. It occurred to us that attendance would be improved if musicians were working toward a performance. I thought of Mike's comment, and I volunteered to talk to him about playing in Haab's backroom once a month. When I approached Mike, it was a pretty easy sale. From early in 2014 to the COVID shutdown, the band had a performance to work toward, and the community had a nice event to look forward to.

All four of these groups came back after the COVID shutdown. All have good websites that will lead you to their performance schedules, and I'm sure all four are happy for your patronage and participation. They are proud of their ties to the Ypsilanti community, and Ypsilanti is fortunate to have them.

A Notes on Sources

Sources for this chapter include mainly the author's personal recollections, supplemented by the bands' and choir's websites.

About the Author

Eric Walters moved to Ypsilanti when he was two years old. He and his wife, Lisa, raised three sons who also attended Ypsi schools and studied several musical instruments. In addition to performing as a musician, Eric has maintained a career in the field of Information Technology. In 2017, Eric and Lisa retired to Palm Springs, California, where he continues to play frequently and has joined a number of local bands. They maintain a second home on Ypsilanti's Ford Lake.

Part Five:
Neighborhoods

Marching Down Michigan Avenue

Downtown Ypsilanti Since the 1950s

BY ELLEN THACKERY

A Sleek New Look

The health of downtown Ypsilanti since the mid-twentieth century has followed the trajectory of many downtowns, especially perhaps in the Midwest. Downtown Ypsilanti was thriving in the 1950s and 1960s, followed by a downturn in its fortunes in the later 1960s through the 1980s, a concerted revitalization effort from the 1980s through the 1990s, and a continuing effort to nurture a vibrant downtown from the 2000s through the early 2020s.

In the early 1950s, much of the downtown's late-nineteenth-century architecture was still intact and in good condition; commercial Italianate buildings still had their ornate bracketed cornices and window hoods.

By 1958, downtown Ypsilanti, at least along Michigan Avenue, was starting to try to shake off its nineteenth-century appearance. Some stores had begun to install colored glass panels or enameled steel panels around the storefronts to give them a more modern appearance. A few stores had even begun to cover up the windows of their second and third stories to bring that sleek, modern appearance not just to the storefront, but to the whole building.

Into the 1960s, downtown businesses were thriving and expanding. By 1963, the idea of modernizing by covering the upper stories of older commercial buildings had really taken hold. In a 1963 photo (see page 210), almost all the stores downtown along Michigan Avenue featured slipcovers or panels (sometimes resembling cheese graters) hiding their nineteenth-century facades. Hartman's, Mellencamp's, Rexall, Moffett's, Seyfried, Moray's, and Brian & Peterson, striving to look modern, had all installed complete coverage from the storefronts to the roofs by 1963. Sleek panels upstairs also allowed for the whole building above the storefront to become the signboard, catering to automobile traffic.



Parade on West Michigan Avenue at Huron, 1951. Much of the Italianate architecture is intact, but there is evidence of signs becoming larger to appeal to drivers as well as pedestrians.

Downtown Gets a Facelift

Two different types of pressure began squeezing downtown Ypsilanti in the 1960s and 1970s: convenient parking and retail competition from outside downtown. By 1960, the historic buildings near the corner of North Huron and Michigan Avenue had been identified as a location for a new parking lot. By winter 1972, the parking lot behind Michigan Avenue at the corner of South Huron—the Huron and Ferris lot—was open. The other pressure on downtown, which was likely helping to drive the desire for convenient parking, was the competitive retail pressure created when regional shopping center Arborland opened in 1961, followed by Briarwood Mall in 1973.

Something else now came to the fore to interact with these pressures: the historic preservation movement. Written into federal law in 1966, historic preservation was enabled at the state level in Michigan in 1970. Ypsilantians knew that they had a unique history and a special collection of historic buildings, and they worked to document and preserve them through the 1970s and 1980s. By 1978, the City of Ypsilanti had adopted a historic district ordinance and established a historic district. These local protections would help prevent the demolition of historic buildings.

Ypsilanti was not alone in facing these various pressures. Older downtowns across the country were trying to compete with regional shopping malls and struggling with sprawling, auto-focused development. In response, in 1980, the National Trust for Historic Preservation created the National Main Street Center. The Main Street approach was based in historic preservation, and strived to help historic downtowns identify and emphasize their strengths, while seeking a diverse downtown business mix

and supporting promotional events. The goal was to help revitalize Main Streets across the country by capitalizing on their historic character and focusing on their assets and people. In 1984, Ypsilanti adopted the Main Street model.

Sue Mosey served as director of the Ypsilanti Downtown Development Authority (DDA) and was the Main Street coordinator from 1984 to 1989. In late 2022, she described that period as a very challenging one for downtowns and one in which downtown Ypsilanti still had several longtime businesses, but, unfortunately, a number of vacancies. Her focus, she said, had been on façade improvements and business recruitment.

To help guide façade improvements, in 1980, the City of Ypsilanti commissioned a façade improvement plan. To help fund the improvements, they applied for Small Cities Community Development Block Grants. A commercial loan review board was formed in town to review applications to the program. Later, façade improvement grants were funded from a portion of the funds that the DDA collected from local businesses.

That initial Small Cities initiative spurred building investment after a period of disinvestment. A 1987 *Ypsilanti Press* article reported that Moray Jewelers, Darby's Shoes, and the Mack & Mack Building received façade funding in that year's grant round. The funds they received were for removing modern coverings and restoring the original historic character of the buildings. These types of façade restorations are examples of the building investments, such as awnings, masonry repair, and painting, that were taking place in this period across downtown.

During this challenging time, in addition to businesses investing in façade resto-



North side of West Michigan Avenue looking east, 1958. Panels surround doors, and storefronts, and cover entire upper façades.



North side of West Michigan Avenue looking northwest, 1963. Almost every building has covered its upper floors entirely, and almost every parking spot is taken.

ration, others were closing. Kresge, a longtime downtown anchor, closed in the mid-1960s, but the 1980s saw Darby's Shoes, Willoughby's Shoes, and Mellencamp's Men's and Boys' Wear close, among others. Moray's closed in 1990, and Pear's Clothing Store in 1997.

Newspaper articles in the 1980s quoted store owners blaming a declining downtown for the business closings, but they also cited the changing nature of retail. In a March 1986 *Ypsilanti Press* article, Tom Willoughby of Willoughby's Shoes said that "the deterioration of the downtown" was one factor that contributed to his store closing, but he also noted that the shoe business seemed to be "gravitating away from the small independent business to the chain, the discounter, the mall locations." In that same article, Sue Mosey said, "You're seeing a trend of some of the old family-owned businesses where they have owners who are near retirement age closing up. . . . We are sorry to see these long-time merchants close, who have served the community for so many years." Mosey continued, "We don't see this as the demise of retailing in downtown Ypsilanti. We see it as getting new types of businesses coming in. We've got a whole list of business types that we're looking for."

One example of a business that opened during that challenging period, and has remained open, is Puffer Red's on Michigan Avenue. Owner Eric Williams opened the store in 1981, and he said that several things happened around that time to help keep downtown's revitalization on track. People were investing in the downtown and participating in the façade rehabilitation program, and property owners in Ypsilanti were watching nearby markets like Ann Arbor to make sure that Ypsilanti remained an affordable place for people to do business. Additionally, the downtown area began reaching out to Eastern Michigan University to bring young people in, and as longtime business owners moved on, new people came in with new ideas.

Preserving the Past for the Future

Throughout the 1990s and 2000s, the DDA continued to recruit businesses and offer façade grants and low-interest loans, but it also expanded its focus to improving the downtown environment. In 1992, the comprehensive report *Downtown Ypsilanti: Economic Revitalization Initiative* was published. The report analyzed the market and compiled feedback from town hall meetings and surveys and, according to lifelong Ypsilantian and former member of city council Barry LaRue, the publication spurred bond issues for streetscape improvements and encouraged continued enthusiasm for façade work, wayfinding, and traffic calming. Bonds were issued for streetscape improvements like the installation of medians on Michigan Avenue to create a boulevard, improved street lighting, and tree planting.

During the 1990s, another focus was the historically sensitive rehabilitation of the city hall at 1 South Huron. In the 1960s, an aluminum “cheese grater” façade had been installed to hide the traditional stone-and-brick building. The city had purchased the building in 1977 for use as the city hall and, in partnership with the DDA, removed the modernizing cover as part of a series of projects that began in 1991.

Other Ypsilanti DDA initiatives in the 1990s and 2000s included partnering with the Friends of the Ypsilanti Freighthouse to restore and open the Ypsilanti Freighthouse for public use. Also work continued on the renovation of the Riverside Arts Center, which the DDA purchased in 1995, and turned over to a nonprofit organization to operate. The Ypsilanti DDA was still following the Main Street model throughout this period, until about 2016, and the focus areas throughout this period were: continued façade rehabilitation grants, downtown improvements (lighting, banners, planters, parking improvements, dumpster improvements), and regular special events downtown, including annual festivals.

Christopher Jacobs, who became the executive director of the Ypsilanti DDA in 2018, said that a grant from the Michigan Economic Development Corporation Façade Restoration Initiative was transformational at that time in activating several key vacant or underutilized downtown properties. A key focus area for the DDA around 2020 was issuing grants to help stabilize businesses and to help build outdoor cafes during the COVID-19 pandemic, which, as Jacobs noted, “threatened to unravel the work we had been doing for years to economically stabilize downtown.” In recent years, Jacobs says that DDA work has expanded significantly into placemaking, special events programming, and new grant programs like the Solar Rebate Initiative.

In a 1984 *Ypsilanti Press* article about Mellencamp’s closing, Sue Mosey acknowledged that “traditional retailers are having the hardest time battling competition from shopping malls. Downtowns like Ypsilanti’s must recognize the need to find a new structure and carve a new niche in the marketing arena, possibly emphasizing specialty shops.” In 2022, specialty shops are a vital part of downtown Ypsilanti, along with restau-

rants, bars, and entertainment. Downtown Ypsilanti in 2023 is full of historic charm, unique retail, and good food, but history shows that thriving downtowns are not happy accidents. Vital downtowns require planning, nurturing, maintenance, positive policies, and community involvement and support.

According to Christopher Jacobs: “On the horizon there are incredible opportunities with the Downtown Tax Increment Financing Revenues and our fund balance growing to support new efforts and major investments in our streetscape and public infrastructure so that downtown continues to attract visitors for the next twenty years. As we look ahead, it remains incredibly important to engage the student and faculty population at Eastern Michigan University following a return to on-campus classes, activate the former college of business at 300 West Michigan, develop Water Street, invest in activating more residential units above commercial storefronts, and solve the parking deficit in Depot Town. If these things are able to come to fruition in our short-term future, it will position Downtown Ypsilanti to prosper well into the future.”

Downtown Ypsilanti has experienced ups and downs over its long history and will continue to do so, but with a clear vision, a passionate commitment to people, places, and sustainability, policies that embody that commitment, and a supportive community, downtown Ypsilanti will remain resilient and vibrant for many years to come.

A Note on Sources

Information for this essay comes from the *Ypsilanti Press*, *Ypsilanti Gleanings*, *Downtown Ypsilanti: Economic Revitalization Initiative*, Main Street America, “Our History” (<https://www.mainstreet.org/aboutus>); DDA meeting minutes; and interviews with Sue Mosey, Barry LaRue, Eric Williams, and Christopher Jacobs. The photographs come from the Ypsilanti Historical Society Archives.

About the Author

Ellen Thackery is the preservation planner for the City of Ypsilanti.

The Phoenix of Ypsilanti

The Resurrection of Depot Town

BY EVAN C. MILAN

Leaving the Station

The story of Ypsilanti has never been one of a single distinct community. The settlement of Woodruff's Grove in 1823 stood a mile from the future center of Ypsilanti. In 1849, when the Michigan State Normal School was founded, a uniquely different neighborhood began to develop; the industrial atmosphere that hovered over the Michigan Avenue corridor yielded to the genteel air that wafted over from the growing educational institution. And previously, in 1838, when the emerging industry of rail travel ran into Ypsilanti, Depot Town was born.

The ebbs and flows of social and commercial life in Ypsilanti, likewise, were not experienced uniformly across its strata of neighborhoods. During the nineteenth century, Depot Town prospered. On July 4, 1859, the Huron Hotel opened. Later renamed the Follett House, the lodging was known to be among the finest between Detroit and Chicago. Five years later, a three-story depot was built that was also considered to be one of the finest on the Michigan Central Line.

Even before Depot Town boasted of numerous opulent edifices, the spirits of the neighborhood's residents ran high. In 1857, Depot Town split from the town to the west and became East Ypsilanti. East and West would only become reunited when the State of Michigan refused to grant a city charter while the two remained divided.

Depot Town's renown would remain for nearly a century. On September 5, 1866, Andrew Johnson's Swing Around the Circle brought the president, along with Ulysses S. Grant, David Farragut, and George Armstrong Custer, to the depot. In July 1900, forty-six cars full of animals and performers pulled into Depot Town for an exhibition of Buffalo Bill Cody's *Wild West Show*. Ypsilanti's depot was, in fact, receiving twenty-six passenger trains a day in 1910, and can even be heard as a stop announced over a P.A. speaker at Chicago's LaSalle Station in the 1959 Alfred Hitchcock film *North by*

Northwest.

On the Wrong Track

The advancements of the twentieth century tipped the scales against Depot Town. The prominence of railroads waned as new modes of transportation overtook them. By 1978, only one passenger train per day stopped in Ypsilanti, and in 1984, the depot was shuttered.

The Depot Town of the late 1960s was not the Depot Town of the 1860s. Most of the buildings along Cross Street were boarded up, and incoming freshman to Eastern Michigan University were told not to go down to the tracks. The businessmen who had built Depot Town into a bustling commercial center had long since passed, and the residents who remained were a cross section of citizens rejected by the more affluent parts of town.

Motorcycle gangs shared, with a tumultuous relationship, the district with migrants of the southern states. The latter community were largely Appalachians who moved northward to find better living conditions, though were met with a degree of prejudice. At a certain point, the presence of the motorcycle gangs became irreconcilable with the other residents of Depot Town. Depending on the source, either dynamite or hand grenades were dropped into the chimney of a known motorcycle hangout; the intended damage was, to the chagrin of the combatants, mitigated by a blockage in the chimney, causing the detonation to reach only the third floor of the Follett House.

But Ypsilanti had not turned entirely away from Depot Town. Carl Miller continued to maintain a successful auto dealership he had opened with Alex Longnecker in 1933. The Thompson Block continued to house a number of businesses, and the Central and Alibi Bars served as popular, if notoriously rough, watering holes.

Thoughts of turning attention to that deteriorating corner of the community were discussed in 1965, when plans began to take shape for the forthcoming sesquicentennial; efforts to address Depot Town, however, came slowly, and nothing substantial materialized until a collection of young artists and adventurous entrepreneurs saw potential in the cheap real estate.

A New Head of Steam

In 1972, Bill and Sandee French bought the Alibi Bar from Bill's father, Aubrey L. French. The Alibi Bar was a rough hangout that had been fully absorbed by the culture of local motorcycle gangs. Linda French, daughter of Aubrey, recalled an instance at the Alibi when a patron received a few blows from a nightstick in return for his unwelcomed demeanor toward the young waitress. The bartender who had wielded the blows sent the ne'er-do-well out of the bar with a complement of blood running down his face.

Though in the 1950s and 1960s it had witnessed a downturn, Depot Town experienced a renaissance in the 1970s. In 1973, John Kornilakis opened the Old Town Restaurant, which remained a staple for years.

That same year, Depot Town became part of the Historic District. Redesignating the neighborhood was a marked point in the shifting tone toward Depot Town. Prior to the renewed interest in the business center, plans were being discussed to scrap what was deemed already lost. In the 1960s, there was a prevalent thought that the most economical solution to blight was to demolish existing structures and erect modern shopping and industrial centers.

Unfortunately, even as some interest in the business center rekindled, there remained an overwhelmingly low opinion of Depot Town's worth. In 1971, a furniture store stood at what is now an alley way. Sometimes misattributed to a bombing that punched a hole into the block, the gap between 29 and 33 East Cross Street resulted from a fire that ignited at 31 East Cross Street.

Like its neighbors, the doomed building was in some degree of disrepair. According to Ypsilanti historian James Mann, the crew that extinguished the flames simply pushed all of the charred debris into the burned-out basement; the property owner was alerted to the damage only after the fact. Never reconstructed, the site at 31 East Cross was converted into a pedestrian walkway lined with benches and markers denoting the history of Ypsilanti.



Cross Street in Depot Town

The circumstances that prevailed in Depot Town at the time, however, can attest to the creditworthiness of Mann's story. Steve Gross, one of the early Depot Town entrepreneurs, recalls that rent was only around \$60 a month, and a building could be purchased along Cross Street for \$14,000. In the 1970s, \$60 rents were a bargain; averages around the United States stood closer to \$100 per month, and home prices stood above \$25,000.

Such low rents and cheap real estate encouraged the neighborhood's renaissance. In 1976, Linda French opened the Depot Exchange, an antiques store next to the Central Bar on the south side of Cross Street. Steve Gross remembers the ideology of opening antique stores in Depot Town: "If you opened an ice cream parlor, and someone else opened another ice cream parlor across the street, it would be a disaster. An antique store, on the other hand...the more antique stores that open, the more the area becomes a destination."

The reestablishment of Depot Town was not just a project of opening new businesses. In 1975, Bill and Jerry French, along with EMU Professor of Art Beverly Shankwiler, came together to form the Depot Town Association. The association has been credited with solidifying the effort to turn the district around from where it had been.

The Depot Town Association brought together business owners, property owners, and residents to focus on the issues at stake. Of the members and leaders, Tom Dodd is among the most fondly remembered. In addition to his tireless work with the association, Dodd also published articles of local interest in his *Depot Town Rag*. Additionally, Dodd was instrumental in obtaining a pre-1900 caboose to stand as representation for the neighborhood's heritage as a railroad hub. Purchased for \$2500 and moved to Ypsilanti in 1979, Depot Town's caboose was put to use as the office for the Depot Town Association.

Light at the End of the Tunnel

The focal point of Depot Town is undoubtedly the railroad. An opulent three-story gothic depot was built in 1864. While the ground level served as a station for the public, the upper stories were dedicated to the use of living quarters for the station master.

After a fire in 1910 and a train derailment that further damaged the building in 1939, the station took on a greatly altered functionalist appearance. The depot was shuttered in 1984 and sold by Amtrak in 1987. Plans to redevelop the station as a restaurant have never materialized. Since it landed in the hopeful hands of private owners Carol and Jim Kovalak, various ideas have been explored but have gone unrealized. Ypsilanti has not received a public passenger train since its shuttering, despite attempts to change this in 2002 and again in subsequent years.

The Freight House, which stands just to the west of the depot, was built in 1878 to aid the increasing amount of freight handling activity in the growing industrial city. The need for a freight office in Ypsilanti waned in the 1950s, and the building became a ware-



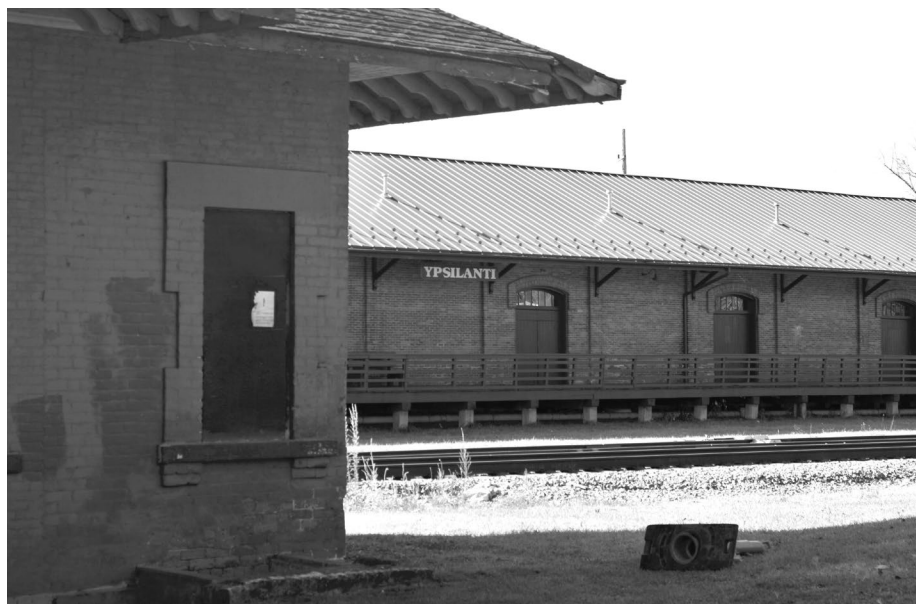
The Railroad Depot

house for a furniture store. Like many of its neighbors, the building fell into disrepair until the dedicated Depot Towners devoted their efforts toward redeveloping the space into a community center.

The Freight House was purchased by the city in 1979 and, according to the *Eastern Echo*, has been host to the Ypsilanti Farmer's Market since 1978. The building was added to the State Register of Historic Places in 1997; however, financial cutbacks and a growing list of required maintenance forced the city to close the Freight House in 2004. The Friends of the Ypsilanti Freight House quickly mobilized and began to work tirelessly to raise funds to reopen what had become a central community meeting point. After refurbishments that totaled more than \$1 million, the Freight House returned as a hub for community events in May 2013.

Perhaps the keystone to bringing Depot Town back from its low state was the push to have the district rezoned. At the time of the neighborhood's rebirth, the area was zoned as M-1, a classification that allows for the establishment of light industry. But by 1988, the character of Depot Town had shifted; the area had developed into a close-knit community inside the greater city. Linda French reflects: "Depot Town has always been about the people; it has been like a family." B2C zoning, a designation that would promote commercial and residential growth, became much more appropriate for further development in the neighborhood where industry would stand as a detriment.

The small-town atmosphere and close-knit feeling of Depot Town continues into the bicentennial year. Though the neighborhood has suffered some losses throughout the years, the positive march forward continues to prevail. In September 2009, the historically significant Thompson Block suffered a catastrophic fire that left a brick shell



The Freight House

of the building that had been used as a barracks during the American Civil War. Today, however, the Thompson Block stands as a triumph over the severe neglect it received. John Carlson and Greg Lobdell acquired the building in 2017 with an aim to restore the challenging piece of real estate. Though the conditions were considerably worse than initially thought, the contractors of 3MISSION Design & Development persevered to revive a key piece of Depot Town. Today the monument to the community's past appears much like it did in the 1890s, with the name Thompson stretched across its southern wall. With the complement of Thompson & Co., offering Southern-inspired cuisine, and its neighbor Mash, serving cocktails and live music, the eastern end of Depot Town is once again a thriving piece of the community.

A number of businesses have passed through Depot Town: Woodruff's stood at 36 East Cross Street from 2010 to 2014, and the Cheeky Monkey Bears and Gifts stood at 33 East Cross Street until 2009. The Sidetrack stands at the corner of River and Cross, as it has since Linda French and Steve Gross opened its doors in 1980; the Depot Town icon offers a long list of beer and exceptional hamburgers. Aubree's, on the north side of Cross street, stands in place of the former Alibi Bar. With some changes made to the establishment in 1979, Bill and Sandee French were able to maintain the Alibi's legacy while providing a softer atmosphere; today families can enjoy a quality pizza where biker gangs once caroused.

The new generation of Depot Town entrepreneurs continue to build on the fifty-year trajectory of renewal. Wax Bar and 734 Brewing Company provide unique gathering

points where cocktails can be shared, and memories can be made. Maiz, once standing far from Depot Town, now takes the place of John Kornilakis' Old Town Restaurant. And still, as business booms in Depot Town, it is the people that remain at the heart of the neighborhood.

A Note on Sources

A number of sources have been consulted to piece together a clear narrative of Depot Town's history since 1973. Sources consulted include the *Ann Arbor News*, *AAA Magazine*, and *On the Ground Ypsilanti*. Additionally, historian James T. Mann, Ypsilanti Historical Society President Bill Nickels, business owners Linda French and Steve Gross, architectural consultant Hannah M. Fajnor, and Ward 3-City Council Woman Annie Somerville all offered great insight into the neighborhood's history. All images were taken by the author.

About the Author

Evan Milan is a graduate of Eastern Michigan University with a Bachelor of Science in History. Beginning with the commencement of his first semester at the university in 2012, Evan has lived in and around Ypsilanti. Joining the Ypsilanti Historical Society in 2018, he has served on the Board of Advisors since 2021. Evan served as Chairman of the Bicentennial Commission in 2022.

How the Historic East Side of Ypsilanti Came Back to Life

BY JANICE ANSCHUETZ

Ypsilanti's Historic East Side is considered a showplace; the beautiful homes are often photographed and featured in various internet sites. But that wasn't always the case. Fifty years ago, the east side of Ypsilanti was considered decaying and dangerous and was "redlined." Dedicated residents helped to change the zoning back to single-family housing. This, along with the Fair Housing Act of 1968 and historic designation, created the ingredients in the recipe to transform neglected housing into the gems that they are today.

A Personal Experience

When my husband and I purchased the historic Swaine House at 101 East Forest in 1969, we were considered "pioneers." *The Detroit Free Press* even sent a reporter out to our home to interview us for a full-page feature article about a young family buying a very old home. Perhaps the reason that this was so unusual, even for Ypsilanti, was that the area was "redlined." This meant that it was racially integrated and no longer considered a "good risk" for banks which might offer money for a mortgage, home repairs, or improvement, or for insurance companies to cover the dwellings.

My husband and I wanted our children to grow up, go to school, and have friends with children of different backgrounds, both economic and social. The large yards with gardens, alleys, and styles of architecture were as varied as the people who called the East Side home, and this appealed to us. Because people were not able to obtain either a mortgage or insurance, the usual method of sale in the east side was by land contract, with some once-beautiful homes having as many as four land contracts attached to their titles.

After getting a mortgage and an insurance policy, and attempting to do as much work on our old home as we could, we joined with a few hardy souls who also loved our neighborhood in an attempt to insure its existence into the future. We first formed the Historic

East Side Neighborhood Association. We wrote, published, and distributed a newsletter which featured some of the unique homes and amazing people who had lived and thrived in our community. We found an agency that printed the newsletters for free and recruited people to deliver them, aged from eight to eighty years old.

The Work of the Association

We held regular meetings inviting representatives from the city council, the mayor, the police, and anyone else—young or old, rich or poor—to join us in discussing problems and solutions. We added community events such as planting flowers in the once-neglected Prospect Park, raising money for a historic sign there, renovating Luna Lake, lobbying to turn the freight house in Depot Town into a community gathering place, holding a historic home tour, and spicing this up with family events such as Christmas caroling with candle light stops in a few houses for cocoa and cookies.



The Swaine House at 101 East Forest was vacant for several years when Janice and Bob Anschuetz bought it in 1968 and restored it.



Hutchinson House, 600 North River Street, was built by Shelly Hutchinson, an East Sider who was born on North River Street. It was funded by his S & H Green Stamp fortune and restored by the High Scope Foundation.

We had many concerns for our neighborhood, from slum landlords who stuffed as many tenants as possible into each dwelling, to crime and blight issues, zoning and safety violations, and anything else that might make the East Side a place where people didn't want to live, visit, or raise their families.

In 1978, primarily because several homes in our neighborhood were being purchased and converted to offices with a “wink” by the planning department, we wrote the lengthy application to form a historic district, requiring us to fill out a long governmental form.

We had to survey the style of homes as well as provide a history of the East Side with cultural implication. Long essays were required, along with many photographs and sources. In the Spring 2019 issue of the Ypsilanti Historical Society's publication, *Gleanings*, I wrote in detail about our grant application, which included the cultural, architectural, and geographical importance of our East Side neighborhood.

We took petitions door to door and asked neighbors to join us in changing the zoning back to single-family housing, instead of the “slumlord friendly” designation that allowed up to eight families to live in a home. Strangely, it seemed that the people most resistant to this were older residents who had lived in their homes for a number of years and thought that there was no way that they could ever sell their house except to an investor who would change it into crowded rental property.



The Gilbert Mansion at 227 North Grove Street, one of the crown jewels of the Historic East Side, had been boarded up and empty for years before being sold for \$1 and carefully restored.

Changes in the Law

This probably was true at the time before the Fair Housing Act of 1968. This act made it illegal to “discriminate in terms, conditions, or privileges of sale of a dwelling because of race or national origin.” The Equal Credit Opportunity Act of 1974 placed strict penalties on realtors and financial institutions for discrimination in granting loans to applicants, made the process of redlining in our East Side neighborhood a thing of the past, and insured that the diversity in our neighborhood would continue.

There is no question that changing the zoning has done nothing but improve prop-

erty values in our historic East Side. This change in zoning was passed by both the planning commission and the Ypsilanti City Council. Its results can be seen today, when neighbors know each other and have a vested interest in maintaining their homes and property, and children can play safely on our residential streets, which was not the case when landlords stuffed the beautiful old homes with transients. There is still a lot of rental, Section 8, and two-family housing available.

Fortunately for the East Side, there was a “perfect storm” of federal laws coupled with the local and state historic district designation which changed the fast decline of a beautiful neighborhood, not to mention hundreds of hours of combined effort by people who grew up and/or lived in the neighborhood. At the same time, some hardy and hopeful individuals were bringing back to life the buildings and businesses of nearby Depot Town. Please don’t think that this has been an easy task for either the Historic East Side or Depot Town. Blood, sweat, and tears has helped to cement the area into what it is today.

A View from the Front Porch

From our large front porches, we can actually see tourists from other areas, perhaps some from towns that have torn down the old homes that once graced the tree-laden streets, walk slowly down our neighborhood with cameras to record the numerous Greek Revival homes from the 1830s, Victorian-era homes with brightly painted gingerbread from the 1870s, Sears Roebuck and other kit houses from the 1920s, four-square family homes from the turn of the century, and cozy bungalows peppered here and there. Butterflies and bees buzz around the many pollinator gardens.

And now, instead of being afraid to walk the streets of the East Side, we gladly stroll or ride our bikes to the Food Co-op, Depot Town shops and restaurants, Prospect, Riverside, and Frog Island Parks, the B2B trail, and to playgrounds, a skate park, and the tranquil Highland Cemetery. It is high above the river where so many East Siders of other generations rest in peace.

The change in zoning and historic designation, as well as federal laws, has left us a legacy that few neighborhoods can boast. I want to quote Dr. Martin Luther King to end this chapter: “I have a dream.” Well, many of us shared that dream of living in an integrated, pleasant, and peaceful environment. The Historic East Side is a good place to live and die in.

A Note on Sources

Information for this essay comes from Janice Anschuetz’s own experience. Further and more detailed information including much of the narrative contained in the Historic Designation document that members of the Historic East Side Neighborhood Associ-

ation submitted can be found in the article about this process in the Ypsilanti Historical Society's publication *Gleanings*, Spring 2019 issue, which can be found at the Ypsilanti Historical Society website. Images are the property of the author.

About the Author

Janice Anschuetz has degrees in history and sociology from Eastern Michigan University as well as a master's degree in social work with a focus on Community Organization from the University of Michigan.

History of the Normal Park Neighborhood Association

BY LISA MILLS WALTERS

Introduction

I have a long-held interest in, and affection for, the Normal Park Neighborhood Association (NPNA). Not only was I a longtime resident of Normal Park and one of its city council representatives, I was also a charter board member of the NPNA and long-serving president, secretary, and newsletter editor. I greatly enjoyed my time living in Normal Park, and after more than thirty years, I thought it might be a good time to look at how the association got its start and realize how far it has come.

NPNA Origins

The NPNA held its first general meeting on August 2, 1990. The idea for such a group, however, was born about a year earlier.

Many residents were concerned about traffic speed on Wallace and other streets in the neighborhood. Three of these neighbors, unaware of the existence of the others, independently contacted then-Ward Two councilmember Mike Homel for assistance. Mike, knowing there was strength in numbers and seeing an opportunity for the neighborhood, suggested that they get together and present a petition to the city council, at the time headed by Mayor Clyde King. As the three neighbors worked on this, they realized that they had other goals and interests in common and that other neighbors probably did, too.

The first newsletter was published in May 1990. At this time, the three volunteers proposed an association that would give residents the opportunity to socialize with each other and through which they could “improve the safety, quality, and appearance of our neighborhood.” The newsletter also explained in detail the traffic/pedestrian concerns of the neighborhood and stated the exact wording of the petition.

Official Beginnings

Both the idea and the petition, which was submitted to the city council that June, were a success. By the time the first NPNA meeting was held in Edith Hefley Park on August 2, 1990, new stop signs had already been installed. Residents quickly got to work on plans to write a charter, elect board members, clean up Recreation Park, and deal with issues regarding the party store on Congress Street near Summit. In January 1991, eleven neighbors and I volunteered to serve on the board, with Cathy Vlisides serving as the first president. We created committees to deal with neighborhood watch, Recreation Park, membership, fundraising, social events, and other issues. Residents were invited to inform the board of their concerns and what they saw as the role of the association.



Sign at one of the four corners of the neighborhood

Creating a name, logo, and signs for the association made for some interesting discussions. The new board determined the general boundaries of the association to be West Cross to the north, North Mansfield to the west, South Congress to the south, and North Summit to the east. “Normal Park” is the legal description of much of this area, specifically from North Wallace Boulevard east; the west part of the area is platted “Orchard Park.” Because of the history of the Michigan State Normal School (now Eastern Michigan University) and the fact that the majority of neighbors lived within the area designated as Normal Park, we went with that name.

Next we discussed the signs that would be posted at the four corners of the neighborhood. One board member and wag suggested that our signs read “Abnormals, Keep Out!” We went with more welcoming text and a picture of what we considered a typical Normal Park home; it was actually inspired by the Nickels home at 311 North Wallace. The signs were erected in 1992 and were funded in part by a grant from the Ypsilanti Heritage Foundation.

These signs were our way of announcing that this neighborhood had an identity and proud residents. Previous to this, the neighborhood was sometimes called “the older west side” or just identified by its boundaries. Unlike, for example, College Heights, it had never had an official name. But it wasn’t long before real estate agents were touting the area as one of the city’s most desirable, and within only a few years it was rare to find a city resident who was unfamiliar with Normal Park and its neighborhood association.

Projects and Activities

Through the years we dealt with a few transient issues, such as the party store and excessive street noise, but for the most part, the NPNA focused on its goal of improving the

neighborhood. Probably our most ambitious project was the restoration of Recreation Park. For that, we owe a huge debt of gratitude to neighbor Carol Leyshock who worked tirelessly for many years on park improvements, including a jogging path and playground equipment. Carol and her husband, Rick, also spearheaded the project of returning to its former glory the Rose Garden east of the Senior Center.

Highlights of the NPNA's early days were the annual winter holiday kick-off parties at the Senior Center and the June picnics in Rec Park. Our neighborhood watch program, including block and street captains, was called "the most well-organized and comprehensive" in the city by our then-police chief. (This took some serious planning and a bit of time in the days before email and internet communication, when everything was accomplished via telephone and door-to-door canvassing.) We took part in the Heritage Festival parade, with longtime board member Jim Hetzel in the guise of A. B. Normal, sporting a conehead and carrying a sign promising higher taxes and fewer services ("a promise I can keep!"). We were charter members of the Adopt-a-Street program, and for its significant efforts at improving our environment, the NPNA received an Ypsi PRIDE award in that event's first year.

The annual neighborhood yard sale each June was, and continues to be, an extremely popular event, drawing shoppers from as far away as Toledo and Grand Rapids. Some have called it a very sophisticated recycling system, where items go from neighbor to neighbor, year after year. In 1996, we got the idea to hold a "bargain sale" at the Senior Center the next day, all of the proceeds going to the restoration of Recreation Park. After the regular sale on Saturday, neighbors would bring their unsold goods to the center where volunteers would organize them. We knew from the start that it would be much too complicated to try to price everything and total the cost at the end, so we opted for an easier way with this slogan: "Take what you want and pay what you like." This proved to be a huge success. Of course there were people who would carry out boxes of stuff and hand us a dollar, but just as often someone would take one book and give us \$20. I specifically remember one woman who bought little and donated a lot, saying, "The enjoyment was priceless." The first year's bargain sale brought in \$750, and our total in 1997 was \$1062.12. The "pay what you like" plan worked very well and accounted for the unusual dollar amount ending in twelve cents; many people simply emptied their pockets.

The association's quarterly newsletter informed residents of neighborhood news, local



NPNA in the 1990 Heritage Festival parade.
Jim Hetzel, a former president of the NPNA,
is on the left.

elections, houses for sale, nearby babysitters, kids' play groups, local concerts and events, and reports for various committees, such as zoning/ordinance, fundraising, membership, and greenscape. The physical newsletter itself is indicative of the growth of the NPNA. We started with a half a page. By 1994, we were printing an 8 x 14 sheet, and in 1997 we had so much news to share that we enlarged our newsletter to a folded 11 x 17 piece. Our number of social events grew, with additions like the Ice Cream Social in 1997, Halloween parade, and Night of Lights. A real estate agent in the neighborhood generously covered the printing costs of many years' worth of newsletters, and a stalwart group of volunteers delivered to homes on their streets.

Quarterly meetings held at the Senior Center featured a variety of speakers on diverse topics like landscaping, Halloween safety, historic preservation, city government, wild birds, homeowners' insurance, and city ordinances. Speakers included such local luminaries as Tony Dearing, managing editor of the *Ypsilanti Press* edition of the *Ann Arbor News*; Barry LaRue, historic preservationist extraordinaire; then-newly appointed City Manager Ed Koryzno; Washtenaw County Circuit Court Judge Kurtis T. Wilder; Alan and Barbara Saxton, local experts on lawn and garden care; then-police chief Len Supenski and several officers; Steve Gross, well-known antiques dealer and auctioneer; Jane Schmiedeke, Historic District Commission chair; Bill Nickels and me, local postcard collectors; and neighbor Lois Katon, who presented a wonderful history of the neighborhood from decades past. This presentation was videotaped and a copy was given to the Ypsilanti Historical Society.

Normal Park was not alone in its desire to create its own identity. Other neighborhood associations sprang up across Ypsilanti: the Historic South Side Neighborhood, located just south of downtown Ypsilanti; the Historic East Side Neighborhood Association, which serves the neighborhood area just east of Depot Town; the College Heights and University Estates Neighborhood Association, located west of Eastern Michigan University; and the Riverside Park Neighborhood Association, serving the area on the west side of the Huron River. In 1997, the NPNA board met with members of these other associations to form Ypsilanti Neighborhoods Organized Together (YNOT?)

Continuing Success

Those of us who have been involved since the beginning are proud of the NPNA's accomplishments and, especially, its longevity. Before 1990, neighbors in many areas of the city often formed alliances when there was a problem to solve. Usually, and often in spite of good intentions, once the problem was solved, the association disbanded. This was not the case with the NPNA, where one of our earliest goals was to enjoy the neighborhood and each other, not just to tackle problems. In 1994, shortly after the city downsized from five wards to three, the *Ann Arbor News* published lengthy profiles of the new wards. I remember one phrase that read something like "In Ward 2, where a neighborhood

association still thrives more than four years after forming.” As then-president, that line pleased me greatly.

And the association continued to thrive. In 2000, the State of Michigan joined with us in celebrating our tenth anniversary; in addition to a proclamation from the Ypsilanti City Council, declaring August 2, 2000, to be “Normal Park Neighborhood Association Day,” we also received tributes from State Representative Ruth Ann Jamnick, State Senator Alma Wheeler Smith, U.S. Congresswoman Lynn Rivers, and Governor John Engler.

As the decades have passed, new residents have volunteered to replace those neighbors who have moved away or grown older, and the board has continued to benefit from an influx of new members with enthusiasm and new ideas. None of the charter board members still live in Normal Park. Some have passed on, some still live in Southeast Michigan, and others have moved out of state. But I know that we all have fond memories of the association and enjoyed our years in such a wonderful neighborhood.



Tenth anniversary cake, July 2000

A Note on Sources

Sources for this account include mainly the author’s personal recollections, supplemented by issues of the NPNA newsletters, copies of which are available at the Ypsilanti Historical Society Archives. All images were provided by the author.

About the Author

Lisa Mills Walters moved to Ypsilanti in 1979 to attend graduate school at EMU. In 1980, she married Eric Walters; they raised three sons and lived in Ypsi for thirty-seven years. During that time, Lisa was elected to City Council; was a founder and long-time president of the NPNA; served on the boards of the Ypsi Heritage Foundation, the Riverside Arts Center, the Ypsi Community Choir, and the Historical Society Archives; was a member of the City’s Recreation Commission and Community Promotions Commission; and served as manager of the Friends of the Library Bookshop. She was employed by EMU from 1987 to 2015, first teaching in the English Department and then as the Graduate School’s thesis/dissertation reader. Lisa and Eric retired to Palm Springs, California, but maintain a summer home on Ypsilanti’s Ford Lake.

Part Six:
Individuals

Reflections of a Former Ypsilanti Mayor

BY GEORGE D. GOODMAN

Early Years

My early years in Ypsilanti are filled with fond memories. I lived on the south side on Madison Street, and recall that back then, the streets were not paved. When it rained, our street was filled with mud. While I don't recall exactly when Madison was finally paved, in my later years, I came to recognize that the main reason for the unpaved streets in our neighborhood was its location on the south side, home to most of the city's African American population.

My dad worked at the Ford Motor Company in River Rouge, and he carpooled daily with the same men. Every weekday, he was up at 4:00 a.m. ready to travel to River Rouge to work. My mother was a homemaker, and she was also interested in serving the community. She started a business from our basement selling hair products. I recall watching as all the various contents were mixed and bottled. Labels were attached and the hair products were ready for sale.

During my youth, my grandfather lived with us. He showed me how to ride my bike. He also helped to build a swing that hung from a huge tree in the yard. Since we lived three blocks from the I-94 expressway, then under construction, he warned me to never get too close to the area. This was obviously my cue to do the opposite.

One day, fire trucks, ambulances, and police cars drove past our house at high rates of speed. There had been an accident on the unfinished expressway—a semi-trailer had rear-ended another vehicle. Notwithstanding my grandfather's admonition, I ended up at the site as an observer. Suddenly, I felt a swat against my back leg. My grandfather had hobbled down the street to tell me to get home. I grabbed my bike and headed back to our house. In hindsight, I realize it had been my grandfather's opportunity to also take in the accident.

After my mother's success at selling hair products, my parents began discussions about

opening a store to sell women's clothes that would also include a beauty parlor. This idea came to fruition, and Goodman's Fashion Center on Harriet Street opened in 1947.

Other important factors led to their decision to build a store primarily for women on the south side of Ypsilanti. At that time, there was a store in downtown Ypsilanti called the Dixie Shop. Women of color could buy clothing at this store, but they were not allowed to try on the clothing. Women living on the south side of Ypsilanti at that time had no place to shop for clothes.

Education and Service

I attended Roosevelt School (RHS) from elementary through high school, playing football and participating in the drama and speech programs. I took a Dale Carnegie speech course and was successful in getting great scores from my peers.

I served as student council president during my senior year, and I was also one of the students selected to participate in the Michigan Chorale, a program sponsored by Youth for Understanding. After graduation, the chorale traveled to Germany to perform a series of concerts. This experience sparked my interest in international travel.

Upon graduation from Eastern Michigan University with a BA in Political Science and the rank of second lieutenant in the U.S. Army, I was assigned to Germany as my first duty assignment. I was married and my wife was able to travel with me. We spent nearly three years there. Our first child was born in Frankfurt at the 97th General Army Hospital.

Returning to Ypsilanti after my army service, I was hired to teach at Roosevelt School. It was my good fortune to be the commencement speaker, in 1967, for Roosevelt's last graduating class.

Community Opportunities

At that time, Ypsilanti's first Black mayor, John Burton, appointed me to the Human Relations Commission, and this became my introduction to community service. Eventually, I became chair, and we took an active role in reviewing and advocating for an open-housing law in Ypsilanti.

After leaving Roosevelt, I was hired as an admissions counselor at the University of Michigan, where I spent five years in the undergraduate admissions office, recruiting students for U-M's Opportunity Program. It was designed to admit more minority students to the university, who were, in that era, being systemically left out. After five years in the admissions office, I became director of the Opportunity Program.

In 1970, I won election to Ypsilanti City Council, and they elected me mayor, in 1972. After a charter revision, the voters elected me mayor in 1973, and I served as mayor for ten years.

In 1983, I resigned my position at U-M to become director of the Michigan

Municipal League (MML), an association that supports the cities and villages of Michigan. Their offices are in Ann Arbor, and they have an office in Lansing as well. I spent twenty-two years with the MML.

The Work of a Mayor

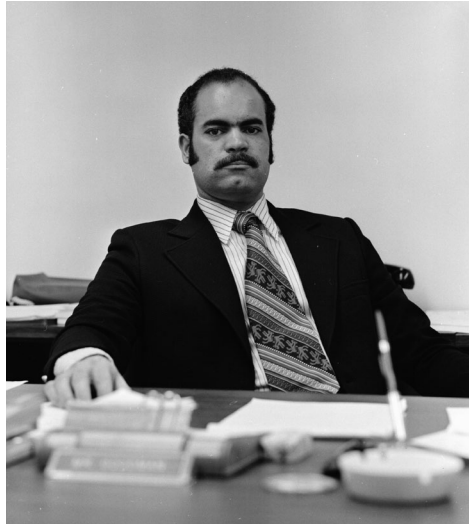
During my ten years as mayor, city hall relocated to a building at the corner of Michigan Avenue and South Huron Street. Senior citizen housing complexes were built downtown and on Chidester Street. Several new bridges were built, along with the first public swimming pool.

The pool did not come about without controversy. The siting of the pool became an issue, and after much discussion among community members, the council decided to build the pool in Recreation Park. The swimming pool was named after Jesse Rutherford, the first director of Parkridge Community Center.

In 1973, I was honored to be mayor during Ypsilanti's 150th birthday celebration. Co-chaired by Marcia Harrison and John Kirkendall, the Sesquicentennial Committee oversaw numerous community activities that occurred throughout that year.

During this time, Ypsilanti also had a sister-city relationship with Naflion, Greece, the city in which General Demetrius Ypsilanti died. Considered the George Washington of Greece, General Ypsilanti helped to liberate his country during its war with the Turks. Today, a bust of Demetrius Ypsilanti sits at the base of the Ypsilanti Water Tower. A second sister city was Dakar, the capital of Senegal. While neither of these sister-city relationships led to in-person visits by local officials from either municipality, communications were exchanged. I received an autographed copy of a large picture book from the City of Naflion, and I later donated it to the Ypsilanti Historical Society.

During the early 1970s, the Federal Revenue Sharing program was in place, and Ypsilanti was eligible to receive its share of these funds. The Ypsilanti Community Utility Authority (YCUA) was formed. This joint water and sewer authority took advantage of federal dollars that were available at that time. Neither Ypsilanti nor Ypsilanti Township could qualify for the federal funds separately. But combining the populations of both units of government made this new entity eligible for the funds. After several conversations between officials from the township and city council, the agreement was ratified.



Mayor George Goodman in the 1970s

Consoling the Community

Some of the most difficult incidents that occurred during my tenure as mayor involved the death of local residents. After the tragic shooting of a local resident at the hands of an Ypsilanti police officer, I attended a gathering of angry citizens at Perry School. There were outbursts of anger and chants that I completely understood, but I felt the need to do what I could to calm the everyone down. After promising a thorough investigation based on the facts, the crowd gradually calmed down and what could have become an explosive situation in the community was averted. (The Ypsilanti Police Chief was present at the gathering, and when it ended, he discovered that the tires on his car had been slashed.)

In 1975, police officer Doug Downing was killed during the holdup of a bank across the street from the Ypsilanti State Police post. When I received word of Downing's death, I was visiting the Ypsilanti State Hospital, and I went directly to the scene of the crime. It is one I will never forget. Downing's body was still lying on the floor of the bank while the investigation was wrapping up.

Another tragedy in Ypsilanti during my tenure occurred in 1978. Three Ypsilanti boys were killed in a tragic bus accident in Georgia. They were traveling to Disney World in Florida when the brakes on the bus failed while attempting to stop at a rest area. The bus had gone down an embankment and struck a tree. Jasen Freeman, Sam Bates, and Tony Sablowski were the local boys we lost, and I was part of a delegation that traveled to Tifton, Georgia, to erect a memorial plague in their memory. These tragedies have remained vivid memories for me.

Master of Ceremonies

Ypsilanti has a council-manager form of government. The mayor and city council appoint the city manager, who runs the day-to-day operations of the city.

As mayor, my role was part-time. I presided at council meetings and attended a variety of ceremonial occasions on behalf of the city. Under a change in state law, I was given the authority to perform marriages. However, a stipulation was that the marriage must be performed within the city limits.

If I was going to preside over a wedding, the happy couple first had to pay the fee to the city treasurer. I had asked our city council to pass an ordinance requiring this.



George Goodman in Summer 2016

I was aware that Dearborn's controversial mayor, Orville Hubbard, who was known for marrying innumerable couples on the steps of Dearborn's city hall, was subject to unsubstantiated rumors, questioning exactly where these fees to perform weddings went. Because of this, I asked our city council to pass an ordinance stating that the fee for a marriage had to be paid to the city treasurer.

I performed several marriages on the indoor steps of city hall and at my home. In one instance, my wife and young sons acted as witnesses.

On one occasion I was asked to perform two ceremonies. The first one was the official event at city hall and the second took place on a boat on Ford Lake.

Once I performed a marriage ceremony on a Friday afternoon at city hall, and I arrived at my U-M office on Monday morning to a call asking me to annul the marriage. I said I was very sorry to hear this, but I explained that I did not have that authority. I never heard anything about how this unfortunate situation turned out.

In one unusual instance, I was the only person in the room who spoke English. The couple had brought an interpreter who translated the entire ceremony into Japanese.

Looking Back

One of the highlights of my tenure as mayor was an invitation to a campaign event for President Jimmy Carter. He was as warm and gracious as you would expect.

During both my professional and public service careers, I have stressed the importance of volunteerism through community involvement. Whether serving as an elected official or a member of a nonprofit organization, I have always found it rewarding to see others grow into leadership roles in the community.

The role and function of local, state, and national governments are important and essential.

I am honored, as a former mayor, to share a few thoughts as Ypsilanti celebrates its Bicentennial.



Goodman with President Jimmy Carter

A Note on Sources

All images were provided by the author.

About the Author

George D. Goodman served as mayor of Ypsilanti for ten years, from 1972 to 1982. He retired from the Michigan Municipal League, in 2005.

Bob Arvin

Destined for Greatness

BY BILL NICKELS

Ypsilanti Beginnings

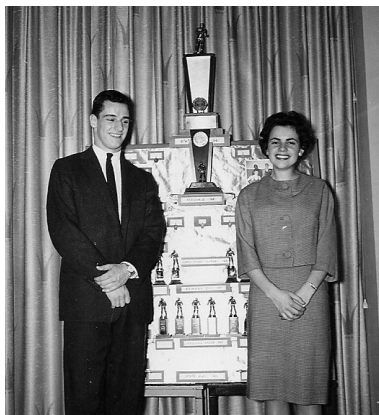
Our country was in the middle of World War II when Carl Arvin served his country as a Military Police officer. Carl and his wife Dorothy's first child, Carl Robert "Bob" Arvin, was born, in 1943, while Carl served. In the years to come, the couple would learn the ways in which the military would come to affect their lives.

The family moved to Ypsilanti and lived at 907 Pleasant Drive for most of Bob's youth. He was a prize-winning paper boy for the *Ann Arbor News* while he attended St. John's Elementary School. Joining Boy Scout Troop 240, Bob became an Eagle Scout and counseled younger scouts at Bruin Lake Boy Scout Camp. Neighborhood girl Merry Lynn Montonye frequently saw Bob at Recreation Park. According to Merry Lynn, they never became friends because he was "playing with sticks and doing boy stuff."

When it came time to attend high school in 1957, Bob enrolled at Ypsilanti High. Excelling in both team and individual sports, he played varsity football for four years and was the team's starting quarterback. Bob also wrestled for four years. During his senior year, he was the 154-pound state champion and co-captain when Ypsilanti High won the state championship. Wrestling teammate Tino Lambros remembers "the long, cold, and dark school bus trips to Lansing, Battle Creek, Kalamazoo, and other places. Bob would curl up in those 'wonderful' bus seats, pull out a small flashlight and a book, and study."

Among his circle of friends in high school was captain of the cheerleaders Merry Lynn Montonye. The two dated sporadically, even when Merry Lynn, who was a year older than Bob, went off to Duke University.

Bob's club activities included four years on the debate team and four years with forensics. He was also chosen to be the lead in the school play and spent two years with the school newspaper. He was student council president in the eleventh grade and class president in the twelfth. Bob graduated as valedictorian of his class and was elected



Bob Arvin and Merry Lynn Montonye at his State Championship wrestling banquet, 1961

to the National Honor Society. In 1989, classmate Dr. Frank Sayre remembered: "Greatness was in his life. If anyone was destined for major accomplishments, for a national presence, it was Bob Arvin."

West Point

Upon graduation from high school, Bob received scholarship offers from Harvard and six other schools. Bob's mom said, "A Yale scholarship didn't turn Bob's head--he was West Point bound." He became a plebe at the U.S. Military Academy, in July 1961. The following summer, at Camp Buckner, New York, he distinguished himself by winning both the Triathlon (swimming, cross country, and rifle) and "Recondo" competitions. The latter was a hand-to-hand combat pit fight where he was the last man standing among better than 700 classmates.

Bob was a star athlete at West Point, lettering in wrestling during all three of his varsity years. During his senior year, he was elected captain. His coach was instrumental in the creation of the Arvin Wrestling Award, which is given annually to "the graduating member of the wrestling team who best exemplifies the qualities of Carl Robert Arvin in the areas of leadership, scholarship, and commitment to Army wrestling."

Bob was also active in other areas of student life. He was a leader in the Student Conference on U.S. Affairs (SCUSA). SCUSA was a four-day conference where students discussed issues facing our country. His editorial interests continued as co-editor of the HOITZER student publication. A devout Catholic, Bob was a member of the Catholic Chapel Choir and a chapel acolyte.

After Merry Lynn graduated from Duke, her first teaching job was in White Plains, New York, a short drive from West Point. She said their relationship ran hot and cold during this time.

It is the responsibility of General Davison, Commandant of Cadets, to select the First Captain and Brigade Commander of the Corps of Cadets during their senior year. He remembered "It was my privilege as Commandant to select Bob to be First Captain. I admired him greatly; he was a concerned, compassionate leader who held the complete respect of his fellow cadets." As First Captain, Bob hosted former president Dwight D. Eisenhower for the Fiftieth Reunion of the Class of 1915 and together they broke ground for a new campus building.

Bob graduated 44th out of a class of 596 in 1965. He was a recipient of the Persh-

ing Writing Award, given to the graduate who best reflected on his four years at West Point and what it meant to him. As the cadet who best exemplified the traditions of the United States Military Academy and the United States Army, he also received the Association of the United States Army Award. For exhibiting military efficiency, he won the Avarian Award. Bob was also a finalist for a Rhodes Scholarship.

United States Army

After graduation as a second lieutenant, Bob went to Fort Benning, Georgia, in August 1965, for specialized training. He completed both Ranger and Airborne Jumpmaster schools. He selected the famed 82nd Airborne Division at Fort Bragg,

North Carolina, as his first assignment. The selection of the 82nd Airborne was indicative of his desire to serve up front with the action.

While in Ranger school, Bob's West Point friend Mike Moseley invited Bob and Merry Lynn to a beach house in Delaware. During the drive, Bob asked Merry Lynn to marry him. Their marriage took place on July 30, 1966, back in Ypsilanti, at St. John the Baptist Catholic Church. They had nine months together before Bob left for Vietnam, in early 1967, as an advisor in the Military Assistance Command Vietnam (MACV).

Vietnam

Bob Arvin reported to his advisory detachment, the 7th Vietnamese Airborne Battalion, in May 1967. His West Point classmate, Chuck Hemingway, also with the 7th Battalion, was killed in June 1967. Bob was assigned to take his place.

The 7th Battalion was assigned to protect the vital Hue Phu Bai Air Base near the town of Hue. Hue was in the center of a cluster of towns that included Khe Sanh and



Former President Dwight Eisenhower, left, returned to West Point for his 50th class reunion in 1965 and attends a groundbreaking along with Arvin, second from left.

As West Point's First Captain, Bob hosts President Eisenhower's fiftieth West Point class reunion, 1965

Da Nang just south of the DMZ that separated North and South. Bob served as an advisor to the 7th Battalion, and the U.S. Army later officially recognized his value, stating: "Captain Arvin was noted for the inspiration he provided the Vietnamese soldiers and was instrumental in assisting them in successfully accomplishing their missions."

The pace and intensity of the war picked up during the summer of 1967. According to the U.S. Army, on 5 September 5, 1967:

the battalion was deployed in a three-pronged assault on suspected enemy positions. As the unit approached the objective area, the entire left flank came under intense mortar and small-arms fire from Viet Cong

bunker and trench complexes located on the rice paddy perimeters. An element on the left flank was overwhelmed by the fierce fire and withdrew, leaving Captain Arvin, his counterpart, and two radio operators alone. Undaunted by the perilous circumstances, Captain Arvin led the group forward to engage the enemy. In doing so, one of the radio operators was wounded. Although wounded himself, Captain Arvin, with complete disregard for his personal safety, moved through enemy fire to the man and dragged him to a relatively protected location. Returning to the group, he began directing repeated armed helicopter gunship strikes as all elements of the battalion now engaged the enemy. Then, heedless of the increasing volume of enemy fire, Captain Arvin established a landing zone and supervised the evacuation of the wounded. Refusing evacuation himself, he returned to the front to continue to advise and assist in the conduct of the battle. As a direct result of Captain Arvin's indomitable fighting spirit, positive leadership, and calm courage throughout the hours-long battle, the insurgents were forced from their positions, and the 7th Battalion was able to secure the objective.

Following a brief hospitalization, Bob returned to his battalion, which was preparing to clear enemy forces from the air base. Again, according to the U.S. Army, on October 8, 1967:



Bob after completing both Ranger and Airborne training, 1966

Bob's unit was completing a sweep of a suspected enemy base when an entrenched regiment was engaged. Captain Arvin was accompanying the battalion in a sweep of suspected enemy positions when the unit came under intense hostile mortar and automatic weapons fire. As the volume of enemy fire increased, Captain Arvin called for helicopter gunships for support. Realizing that the battalion was facing a determined enemy, Captain Arvin left his relatively safe position and raced through fire-swept fields to a forward position where he expertly began directing the gunships on target. With enemy activity temporarily suppressed, the battalion continued to move forward until it was resubjected to punishing mortar and small-arms fire. Once again Captain Arvin valiantly and in full view of enemy gunners, moved through the fire to a forward vantage point. There, as fighting raged about him, he directed extremely accurate, close range gunship passes onto enemy positions. As a direct result of Captain Arvin's unrelenting attention to duty, resolute courage, and superb direction of ground forces and supporting aircraft, a strong and determined enemy was forced to flee in defeat.

For these actions, the Army stated: "Captain Arvin's conspicuous gallantry in action was in keeping with the time-honored traditions of the United States Army and reflected great credit upon himself and the military service."

Bob was mortally wounded by small arms fire, on October 8, 1967, and he died on the field of battle. Bob had been days away from a transfer to Saigon to join the staff of General William Westmoreland,.

Bob's body was returned to Ypsilanti to lie in state in St. John's, the first layman to do so in that church. Two days later, a Catholic funeral mass was held. His school and Boy Scout life began in the same church that presided over the end of his life.

Bob was buried at West Point, on October 17, 1967, with military honors. Mourners included Bob's family, the West Point wrestling team, members of the 82nd Airborne, and the Superintendent of the Academy. In a letter to Bob's parents, General Westmoreland wrote "He was one of the most outstanding young men I have had the privilege of knowing. The Army has lost one of its future leaders."

Posthumous Honors

For the engagement with the enemy on September 5, Bob was posthumously promoted to captain and awarded a Silver Star for gallantry in action and a Purple Heart for the wound he received. For the October 8th engagement Bob was awarded a second Silver Star Oak Leaf Cluster for his gallantry that day and a Purple Heart because of his mortal wounds.

On February 25, 1989, West Point renamed the cadet gym the Arvin Gymnasium in honor of Bob. In 2005, the Arvin Cadet Physical Development Center was dedicated. Like Eisenhower, Sherman, Lee, MacArthur, Pershing, and Grant, the name Arvin on

a West Point building honors a West Point military hero.

Bob Arvin was memorialized locally too. When the Michigan Military Museum opened in 1987, Bob's service was honored with a display of some of his military possessions. On June 15, 2002, the Ypsilanti Veterans of Foreign Wars Post 2408 named their post the C. Robert Arvin VFW Post 2408. Items from the Michigan Military Museum were shared with the VFW. In 2012, the Arvin display moved to the Ypsilanti Historical Museum in order to give the display more visibility.

Also, on June 15, 2002, VFW Post 2408 created the Captain C. Robert Arvin Educational Fund to honor Bob's legacy of excellence. By 2004, golf fundraisers brought in enough money to award \$1000 annual scholarships to between six and twelve local high school graduates.

Ypsilanti High School initiated an Athletic Hall of Fame in 2004. Bob's considerable athletic achievements were honored in the second induction, on September 30, 2005. He is now immortalized in the school that provided the environment that allowed him to grow into the leader he became.

A Note on Sources

Information for this article comes from conversations with Bob's friends and newspaper clippings. All images are from the Ypsilanti Historical Society Archives.

About the Author

Bill Nickels is President of the Ypsilanti Historical Society and Professor Emeritus of Chemistry at Schoolcraft College. He served ten years on the Ypsilanti Historic District Commission and twelve years on the Ypsilanti City Council (Ward 2). He is also a long-time member and past president of the Ypsilanti Heritage Foundation Board.

Among Ypsilanti's Finest

The Life and Legacy of Medal of Honor Recipient
Lt. Col. Charles Seymour Kettles

BY CONNOR K. ASHLEY

"With all due respect to John Wayne, he couldn't do what Chuck Kettles did."

– President Barack Obama

Interviewing a Hero

On the morning of November 15, 2005, United States Army veteran, Eastern Michigan University alum, and longtime Ypsilanti resident Charles Kettles sat down at his kitchen table to record a video history of his experiences in the U.S. Army.

An American flag was to his left, intentionally placed nearby. Bill Vollano of the Ypsilanti Rotary Club was sitting across the table from Charlie. Vollano had been volunteering his time to record oral histories of veterans for the Veterans' History Project of the Library of Congress. As the interview began, Kettles settled into his signature matter-of-fact speaking style, recounting his time serving at military installations both in the U.S. and abroad. Right before the video's twenty-minute mark, Ann Kettles can be heard interrupting, saying to her husband, "Hey, Charlie, be sure to get around to telling them about the fifteenth of May." Ann was referring to May 15, 1967, when her husband led the airborne rescue of over forty U.S. Army soldiers under serious threat by North Vietnamese forces in a riverbed west of Duc Pho in South Vietnam. Kettles turned to his wife, calmly replying, "Ann, I'll get to it."

Over the forty minutes that remained, Lieutenant Colonel Kettles described one of the most significant acts of American heroism of the Vietnam War. Before leaving, Vollano asked if he could take some documents and a map from Kettles, in order to do more research.

Following the interview, Bill Vollano, the Congressional offices of first John and then Debbie Dingell, and many other influential Ypsilantians lobbied hard for Charlie

Kettles to be awarded the Medal of Honor for his extreme bravery on that long-ago day in May. It would take nearly a decade, but their efforts finally paid off. In July 2016, retired Lieutenant Colonel Charles Seymour Kettles traveled to Washington, D.C., for a ceremony at the White House, where he would be lauded as one of the finest to have ever called the city of Ypsilanti home.



Retired Lt. Col. Charles Kettles receiving the Medal of Honor from President Barack Obama, 2016 (Photo: Office of the White House Press Secretary)

From Humble Beginnings

Charles Seymour Kettles was born on January 9, 1930, to Grant and Cora Kettles in Ypsilanti, Michigan, where he would live for much of his life. Kettles received his high school diploma from the Edison Institute at Greenfield Village, in nearby Dearborn. After graduating, he enrolled in the Michigan State Normal College (now Eastern Michigan University) in his hometown.

In 1951, just two years into his college career, Kettles was drafted into the United States Army. After completing basic training at Camp Breckinridge, Kentucky, Kettles attended Officer Candidate School at Fort Knox, Kentucky, where he was commissioned in the U.S. Army Reserve, in February 1953. By the end of 1953, Kettles had also graduated from Army Aviation School. From 1954 to 1956, Kettles was deployed in Korea, Japan, and Thailand. Following this, Kettles decided to retire from active duty, remaining in the army reserve, and eventually opening a Ford dealership with his brother Dick in DeWitt, Michigan.

However, as the war in Vietnam continued to escalate and the need for army aviators increased, Kettles volunteered for active duty in 1963. After training to learn to operate the UH-1D "Huey" helicopter, in 1965, Kettles was deployed to Vietnam for tours of service, in 1967, and from 1969 to 1970. It is for events during this 1967 deployment that Charles Kettles would be awarded the Distinguished Service Cross and later the Medal of Honor.

Acts of Valor

On the morning of May 15, 1967, members of the 1st Brigade, 101st Airborne Division, came under intense enemy attack by North Vietnamese forces while traversing the Song Tra Cau riverbed west of Duc Pho, Vietnam. After hearing of the besieged soldiers, Kettles volunteered to lead a mission of the 176th Aviation Company to evacuate the wounded and bring needed reinforcements to the quickly deteriorating riverbed position. North Vietnamese Army forces in overwhelming numbers engaged in a highly disciplined attack against both the positions of the 101st Airborne units on the ground and the incoming Huey helicopters of the 176th Aviation Company that were making their way into a "hot" landing zone.

After completing one successful flight into Song Tra Cau, Kettles returned his aircraft to the staging area in Duc Pho to retrieve more reinforcements to fly back with him to the battlespace. Knowing what serious fire his aircraft was likely to come under, then Major Kettles nevertheless set out to return to the landing zone, disregarding his own personal safety. While landing his aircraft in the Song Tra Cau riverbed for the second time, his helicopter was seriously damaged by heavy arms and mortar fire that also severely wounded his door gunner. After loading as many wounded soldiers onto his aircraft as possible, it became clear that his helicopter had suffered significant damage and was actively leaking fuel. However, even with fuel leaking from his aircraft and still under intense enemy fire, Kettles safely flew the helicopter back to the staging area.

Several hours later, the order was given to immediately rescue the remaining forty-four U.S. personnel in the Song Tra Cau riverbed. Forty of the men were members of the 101st Airborne and the remaining four were members of Kettles's own 176th Aviation Company, whose helicopter had been destroyed. With only one remaining flyable helicopter in the 176th, Kettles volunteered to take that aircraft and lead a team of five other helicopters of the 161st Aviation Company to complete the mission. This would be Major Kettles's third landing that day in the Song Tra Cau riverbed.

After the other helicopters touched down at the landing zone and successfully retrieved the soldiers on the ground, Major Kettles received a report that all U.S. personnel had been recovered. Kettles then began to return to the staging area at Duc Pho as the lead aircraft. Before this, his aircraft had not been needed to carry any of the soldiers. As he was leaving the battlespace, he learned that the first report was incorrect and that

eight army personnel were still engaged on the ground with the enemy. These soldiers had been holding off enemy forces to enable others to be rescued.

With complete disregard for his own safety, Kettles transferred command of the airmobile detachment to another officer and immediately returned to the landing zone to rescue the remaining eight men. By then all the other aircraft had left the battlespace, and Kettles and his helicopter would be the only target in an open riverbed for an entire battalion of North Vietnamese combatants. Adding to the difficulty of his situation was that putting eight men in his helicopter would make it too heavy for takeoff. As he landed, Kettles was confronted with small arms fire, automatic rifle fire, mortar shells, and an artillery barrage. This damaged the tail of his helicopter and its main rotor blade and blew out both of his front windshields. Kettles later said it made for "in-flight air conditioning."

Once all eight men were onboard, Kettles now had to find a way to get his helicopter off the ground. Unable to take off like a traditional helicopter, Kettles moved it quickly across the dry riverbed, dragging the aircraft as if he was taking off in an airplane, until gaining enough speed to achieve lift. Because of his actions that day, all forty-four men were successfully evacuated out of Song Tra Cau.

For his three trips as commanding officer, on May 15, 1967, into a hostile landing zone while piloting two severely damaged helicopters, Kettles was awarded the Distinguished Service Cross, in 1968. Kettles later served a second tour in South Vietnam from October 1969 to October 1970.

Honoring a Great Man

After retiring from active-duty service for the second time, Lieutenant Colonel Charles Kettles remained in the army reserve in San Antonio, Texas, where he taught airmobile combat readiness for army aviators. After finally retiring from his duties with the army reserve, in 1978, Charlie and Ann returned to Ypsilanti, where they would spend the rest of their lives. Charlie was active in Kiwanis and the Veterans of Foreign Wars, Post 2408. He also served as a Republican on Ypsilanti's city council, typically populated by Democrats. Kettles was also the founder and an instructor in the Aviation Management Program in the College of Engineering and Technology at his alma mater, Eastern Michigan University.

Following that 2005 oral history with Bill Vollano, years of effort ensued to gain more recognition for the astonishing actions of Charlie Kettles on May 15, 1967, on a Vietnam battlefield. Thanks to the hard work of Congresswoman Debbie Dingell and her staff, a special act of Congress was passed to extend the time limit for awarding the Medal of Honor, specifically for Charlie Kettles to qualify.

On July 18, 2016, hundreds of family members, friends, and honored guests attended the award ceremony at the White House, where retired Lieutenant Colonel Charles

Seymour Kettles was awarded the Medal of Honor, by President Barack Obama. As President Obama said in his opening remarks at the award ceremony: “Nobody deserves [the Medal of Honor] more than Charles Kettles of Ypsilanti, Michigan. Many believe that . . . except for Chuck.” Kettles lived his values of humility and dignity, even while receiving the Medal of Honor from the president of the United States. Several of the men that were saved on May 15, 1967, were in attendance that day and stood during the ceremony to honor Charlie Kettles for rescuing them and saving their lives. Many of the men stressed that they would not have had families were it not for Kettles and, thus, countless people owed their lives to him.

Charles Seymour Kettles died on January 21, 2019, at his home in Ypsilanti. Ann Kettles followed him a year later, on January 9, 2020. They are both buried in Highland Cemetery, in their beloved Ypsilanti.

After continued advocacy for the life and legacy of Charles Kettles, Congresswoman Debbie Dingell ushered through a bill in Congress to rename the Ann Arbor VA Medical Center after Charlie Kettles. Following that act of Congress, on January 5, 2021, the facility officially became the Lieutenant Colonel Charles S. Kettles Medical Center, in his honor. An official award ceremony was held June 18, 2021, where many speakers spoke of the life and service of Kettles.

Charles Kettles served his country with distinction and bravery and was awarded the country’s highest military honor. His legacy of heroism is a lesson for all residents of Ypsilanti and the state of Michigan, and for every American as well. In the fifty years since Ypsilanti’s sesquicentennial, no citizen of our city has been more worthy of emulation than Charlie Kettles. May he be remembered as among the finest citizens of Ypsilanti in its long and storied two-hundred-year history.



Charles Kettles, 2019 (Photo: *EMU Today*)

A Note on Sources

Information for this essay comes from “Medal of Honor: Lieutenant Colonel Charles Kettles, Biography” (<https://www.army.mil/medalofhonor/kettles/>), “Lieutenant Colonel Charles S. Kettles VA Medical Center, (<https://www.vva310.org/lieutenant-colonel-charles-s-kettles-va-medical-center>), “Charles S. Kettles obituary,” Janowiak Funeral Home (<https://www.janowiakfuneralhome.com/obituary/charles-kettles>), and “Medal of Honor Recipient Charles Seymour Kettles Veteran Oral History,” Veterans History Project collection, Eastern Michigan University archives (<https://www.youtube.com/>

watch?v=iCthnGna-6g&t=7s)

About the Author

Connor K. Ashley is an EMU graduate student studying for his MA in history and MS in historic preservation. Connor received his BA in political science from Wayne State University, in 2019. He is also a graduate assistant in the Department of Geography and Geology, in the EMU Archives, where he has worked closely with the Veterans History Project collection donated by Ypsilanti Rotary Club volunteer Bill Vollano.

COVID-19

A Personal Recollection

BY NICK WILLIAMS

A Pandemic Begins

On December 31, 2019, the World Health Organization office in China was informed of a new respiratory illness of unknown origin. On January 15, 2020, the Japanese Ministry of Health confirmed the first case of the same illness outside of China. On January 17, 2020, the U.S. Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) began screening passengers for symptoms of what was identified as a coronavirus. The first case in the United States was confirmed by the CDC on January 20, 2020. The media reported on the newly named Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) as a potentially serious health problem. I think the public had the belief that this was another health issue that the medical community would get under control, and all could quickly move on.

A community meeting that I planned to attend on Sunday, March 15, was canceled, and a board meeting on Wednesday, March 18, was canceled, both because of this new virus. The lease on my car was coming due on Friday, March 20. Since I had several hundred unused miles on the car, I decided to visit with my son and his family, in Minnesota, for a few days and return to turn the car in. I left on Thursday March 19.

That weekend, I learned that the number of COVID-19 cases had exploded in Michigan, while Minnesota was mildly threatened. On Monday, March 23, I learned that my car dealership was closed until further notice, canceling the necessary end-of-lease return.

Early in April, the number of cases in Minnesota started to catch up with Michigan's case count. Learning that my car dealership would reopen, I left for home on Sunday April 12. I planned to make the drive with one stop west of Chicago. The Oasis rest stop, usually full of travelers, was empty and the food vendors closed. The highway through downtown Chicago was empty; I made that drive back to Ypsilanti in record time. My lease car was returned to the dealership on April 17.

The New Normal

I was introduced to Zoom videotelephony software for a board meeting on Wednesday, April 15. A volunteer road cleanup was canceled as was a sporting event scheduled for April 19 and a breakfast for volunteers. On Monday, May 4, I contacted the Ypsilanti District Library to help me with an organizational Zoom account, and it was expected that this would be the future of meetings.



Children go to school at home, 2020

Sporting events were either canceled or went on with empty grandstands. The Ypsilanti District Library closed as did museums and businesses that were not critical. Schools closed and children were now learning in front of a computer at home. Employees worked from home when their offices closed. Many stayed closed for up to sixteen months. To survive, restaurants offered drive-by pickup.

I employed the same person to cut my lawn for many years, and I got to know him quite well. One day, a different person arrived to cut my grass. When Daniel again didn't show up the next week, I asked the crew leader where he was, and he told me Daniel was sick. When the lawn crew arrived the next week, I learned Daniel had

died of COVID. He was fifty-some years old.

At about the same time, I learned that an over-sixty friend I worked with had also died of COVID-19. Two of my sister-in-law's ninety-plus family members also died from COVID in quick succession. The United States eventually reached one million reported deaths from COVID on May 17, 2022. Expecting that many deaths were not reported, the real number at that time was probably much higher.

Closed signs appeared on many Ypsilanti businesses. Board games and puzzles were hard to find in stores. In March of 2020, employees started working from home either part-time or full-time. Not being able to spend money in other ways, homeowners planned upgrades to their homes. What was in high demand during our normal economy was no longer in high demand. "Logistics" became a household word as the movement of goods slowed down locally, nationally, and internationally. Shortages appeared in grocery stores. You were never sure what you would be able to buy. The availability of paper towels and toilet paper was always uncertain.

Human contact while grocery shopping immediately became an issue. At the

beginning of the pandemic I shopped at Ypsilanti's Food Co-op, which offered drive-by pickup. Instacart, an online grocery shopping service formed in 2012, suddenly became very popular. I found I could sometimes get same-day delivery with Instacart, but other times I had to wait until the next day. People became fearful that home delivery of food would bring



Empty store shelves, 2020

the virus to their homes. It was first recommended that purchasers leave the food on their front porch for a specified time to allow the virus to lose effectiveness. This was quickly discovered to be unnecessary, with people realizing it posed a minimal risk.

The United States closed its border with many countries, including Canada. Canada did the same to the United States. It wasn't until the summer of 2022 that both borders were back to normal.

Mask wearing became the primary protection from COVID-19. The virus exploded so fast that commercially produced masks were in short supply. Those with sewing skills made cloth masks for their family members. Some expanded their production of cloth masks and started small businesses.

An N95 filtering facepiece respirator became the most desired mask because it met the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health standard for air filtration. It filtered at least 95% of airborne particles. A KN95 mask, made in China, was expected to do the same and became the second choice.

Hope Appears

When COVID-19 first became a pandemic, the news media reported that it would take years to develop a vaccine. The United States Food and Drug Administration (FDA) approved the first COVID-19 vaccine for emergency use on December 11, 2020. It was marketed by Pfizer, Inc., and called the Pfizer-BioTech COVID-19 vaccine. A second Moderna COVID-19 vaccine received emergency use approval on December 18, 2020. Both were two-dose vaccines. Pfizer's wait for the second dose was twenty-one days, and Moderna's wait was twenty-eight days. A third Johnson and Johnson one-dose vaccine received emergency FDA approval later.

After FDA emergency approvals, the Pfizer vaccine was the first to become available,

early in 2021. The Washtenaw County Health Department, St. Joseph Hospital, and local pharmaceutical chains accepted names to be put on a list to receive the vaccine. Senior citizens and immunocompromised people were given priority for the first shot.

I got my name placed on the Washtenaw County, Lenawee County, CVS Pharmacy, and St. Joseph Hospital lists. I waited while many of my friends were



“Mask on Ypsi” yard sign, 2020

called for their first dose. Some called in for the vaccine were younger than me. The worrisome wait for that first dose was frustrating. One day, a work colleague who lived in Livonia and was already vaccinated called to tell me he had found out that he could make an appointment for his first dose, and did I want the appointment? I would have to drive to Northville to a pharmacy in a Meijer store. For me, being unvaccinated was like having a terminal illness. Receiving my first Pfizer shot on February 9, 2021, was my idea of a miracle cure. I got my second Pfizer dose on March 2, 2021. The CDC Vaccination Record Card became a ticket to events that limited attendance to those protected with two-dose vaccinations!

Like the traditional flu, COVID-19 became less of a problem during the warm weather summer months. I planned a European trip for September 2021 to visit friends. It was reported that the protection provided by the vaccinations would wear off over time, and the CDC announced a first booster would become available in late August or September. It appeared the first booster would be too late for me. A friend, who also planned to travel by air in September, told me it was available at an Ann Arbor Walgreen pharmacy in mid-August. I jumped at this opportunity and boarded my Europe-bound plane much relieved.

During the summer and fall of 2021, the European Union required proof of vaccination for entering all countries. The United States required documentation of a negative test within twenty-four hours of a return flight. Getting ready to return home, I found a laboratory that tested and returned results in less than twenty-four hours. Knowing tests sometimes returned false positives, I spent an anxious twenty-four hours before I boarded my return flight.

I received my second booster in April 2022. Early in May, my nephews and a niece in Plymouth invited me to lunch. Like most extended families, we do not see each other

often. It was an enjoyable lunch, and it extended to four hours! Two days later, I came down with a mild fever, sore throat, and I felt very tired. I tested positive for COVID-19! The mild fever disappeared after one day, but exhaustion continued well past testing negative. I was to present a eulogy for my brother-in-law at his memorial service five days after testing positive. Thanks to technology, I was able to eulogize him via Zoom.

After seven days with COVID, I started daily testing. On the tenth day I was finally negative. My case was mild, and I was thankful that my vaccinations had kept the worst of COVID at bay.

During the summer of 2022, life for the most part returned to normal. Approximately 75% of shoppers gave up wearing masks. I made a reservation online to visit a historic site in Pennsylvania. The reservation did not mention COVID-19 precautions. The night before the visit, I was in a Pennsylvania motel and thought to check their website for up-to-date news. I was surprised to read that proof of vaccination was required for entry into the site. Fortunately, I was able to call a neighbor and have her enter my house. She found, photographed, and sent me my proof-of-vaccination card. I entered the historic site relieved, only to learn that their website was out of date and proof of vaccination for admission was no longer required.

An Uncertain Future

I see my primary-care physician early in the fall every year for an annual checkup and to get my flu shot. My October 2022 visit included my third COVID booster shot. Also, during my semiannual visit with my pulmonologist, in October 2022, he said the future of COVID is unknown. More severe mutations could show up or it might slowly disappear. The medical community cannot predict what the future holds.

Currently COVID-19 symptoms are mild for the vaccinated but can be serious, even leading to death, for the unvaccinated. For protection people must continue to wash their hands and it is advised to still wear a mask in some circumstances. Most important is to make sure your COVID-19 vaccinations are up to date. Approximately 79% of the U.S. population has received at least one dose of the vaccine. This percentage varies slightly depending upon the reporting agency.

A Note on Sources

All images are provided by the Ypsilanti Historical Society Archives.

About the Author

Nick Williams is a longtime Ypsilanti resident.

Epilogue

The Bicentennial

An Epilogue

BY EVAN C. MILAN

A Moment of Pause

A bicentennial is a rare thing to have. Though communities are built on the cutting edge, time often has a dulling effect. Local identities fade, and the communities that once came together begin to segment. But despite the disappearance of many of the villages and frontier towns that sprouted in the early nineteenth century, Ypsilanti has held its edge for two hundred years.

The study of history has changed a lot since the celebrations of 1923 and 1973. The light and celebratory touch that our history was once painted with, was permissible in a world that desired to leave the painful horrors of the past in archives. The world of the twenty-first century is vastly different though. It is through this, at times uncomfortable process, that we may forge ahead together toward our semiquincentennial.

Our Past

Ypsilanti is like many American towns. In the eighteenth century, the site of our community was already the established home to many. The Odawa, Ojibwa, and Potawatomi made their home on the banks of the Huron River as the Council of the Three Fires. The Wendat people, too, called this land home before American expansion altered the social landscape. As a Northern city, Ypsilanti became a transit station along the Underground Railroad prior to the Civil War. By the twentieth century, driven by the chugging machine of progress, Ypsilanti was a city of richly diverse tradespeople.

The Second World War sent the young people of Ypsilanti to the distant battle fields of Europe and into the rough waters of the Pacific. Those women who remained on the home front built the bombers that aided in the liberation of a threatened world. Yet, despite the worlds triumph over fascism, the civil unrest that followed the end of World War II rocked Ypsilanti as it did bigger cities around the United States. The enclaves

that had collectively made up the city, were segregated from one another; renowned community gathering places imposed business practices with racial parameters.

Following an economic downturn in the latter part of the twentieth century, Ypsilanti experienced a renaissance in the last decade before the new millennium. Socially, a push for LGBTQ+ equality led to the passage of the city's nondiscrimination ordinance in 1997. The City of Ypsilanti, in fact, has continued to develop into a proudly diverse community.

A microcosm of the nation around it, Ypsilanti experienced many of the turbulent waves that the early 2020s brought. The COVID-19 pandemic largely shuttered the city, and the shockwaves that rippled through America after the death of George Floyd mobilized Ypsilanti to ask its own questions of accountability of its police force. The businesses that the pandemic initially closed soon found ways to reopen to patrons with modifications to their existing business models; however, business owners and employees found themselves at odds concerning the safest practices to follow during a global pandemic and extreme worker shortages.

As we look back, we know that Ypsilanti exists on land that was taken from the native peoples by the Treaty of Detroit on November 17, 1807. There is documentation of prominent Ypsilanti residents in blackface and redface into the twentieth century. Discrimination has plagued Ypsilanti, as it has in neighboring communities in Metro-Detroit and beyond.

But the people of Ypsilanti have a fierce loyalty to the community that exists today. Ypsilanti is a community that harbors young entrepreneurs and offers its hospitality to all. Our bicentennial allows us a point to come together and celebrate the community in which we currently live, while acknowledging and learning from both positive and painful pieces of our past.

A Rough Start

At its most basic level, the bicentennial is a tick on our community growth chart. And, it was with this thought in mind that conversations began over how to acknowledge Ypsilanti's forthcoming anniversary.

A committee devoted to developing a plan for the impending bicentennial collected and disbanded twice before its third and current iteration. Early meetings of those first two committees set out a basic outline for the events of 2023, before more pressing matters came to the forefront. The onset of the global pandemic brought any bicentennial plans to a standstill before finally dissolving completely. It was not until 2021, over a year after the second committee's last meeting, that interest in the bicentennial rekindled.

Jim Curran, who was then chair of the Ypsilanti Historical Society (YHS) Advisory Board, initiated conversations with longtime board member Nancy Wheeler and me, a newly appointed board member. These early conversations pertained to YHS's involvement with the city's bicentennial.

Mr. Curran passed in early 2021, after to a short battle with cancer. However, in large part due Jim's excitement, I reached out to YHS President Bill Nickels. Bill had been a member of the former bicentennial committee, and, as a longtime resident, former councilman, and leader of the YHS, proved indispensable in reviving excitement for 2023.

After our initial conversation, Bill and I agreed that the most important piece of our bicentennial would be the creation of a book. Our bicentennial book's purpose would be to detail the history of Ypsilanti in the past fifty years; our installment would be a continuation of the stories published in 1923 by Harvey C. Colburn and in 1973 by the Sesquicentennial Committee. The book would be a record that later generations could look back on when discussing Ypsilanti in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries.

But it was agreed on that there should be events planned for the residents that make up the city. The first meeting of the bicentennial's third committee came in Fall 2021 with only a handful of participants. Though the initial group was small, there was representation from several local organizations including Eastern Michigan University, the Ypsilanti Historical Society, and the City of Ypsilanti. With great enthusiasm for developing a meaningful bicentennial celebration, a three-page list of possible events was drafted up, and our initial group of six quickly grew to twenty-five.

The Plan Gets Underway

The business of executing a bicentennial celebration was soon at the forefront of committee meetings: the lengthy list of celebration ideas being realistically honed, and a draft budget drawn up, the priority became structure. With the short-term nature of our collective organization, the creation of a 501(c)(3) was deemed excessive. The ideal model for our committee relied on existing within an established organization who could also act as a fiduciary. The passions of the community and its variety of perspectives were exposed through the process. After considering a number of community organizations to function under, it was agreed upon that a commission would be created under the City of Ypsilanti.

After establishing a framework, the earliest efforts were turned to communication. Tom Koch, City Communications Manager, and Maria Skrzynski, Marketing Coordination for Destination Ann Arbor, spearheaded the project of creating a social media presence and community touchpoint to allow the community and the Ypsilanti Bicentennial Commission to remain connected.

With aim to bring greater exposure to the impending anniversary, a presence was made in the 2022 Fourth of July Parade. Though, Bicentennial Commissioner John Gawlas alone bore the responsibility of representing the group, a number of community volunteers stood with John in place of those who were out of town at the time.

It was soon determined that there would be three major components to the Bicentennial: the book of histories, *Love Letters to Ypsi*, and our major events. The book of

histories was developed to tell the story of Ypsilanti in the last fifty years by EMU History Professor John McCurdy, Bill Nickels, and Ypsilanti District Library Head of Acquisitions Sarah Zawacki.

EMU Engage Associate Director and County Commissioner Caroline Sanders developed *Love Letters* as early as our first committee meeting. *Love Letters* was to be an enduring piece for the community to express their feelings for the city we celebrate. Ann Blakeslee and her organization YpsiWrites, a non-profit organization devoted to developing the writing skills of the community, took Caroline's idea and created an accessible community contribution to the bicentennial. Annie Somerville, with her team of Timothy Sabo and Sean Driscoll took on the daunting task of planning the major events that would bring the community together.

In November 2022, as this narrative is written, it is impossible to know how the bicentennial will unfold. As the economic pressures of a pandemic and the growing rift in global relations bare down, fundraising remains a challenge. The initial plan for a years' worth of events had a predicted budget of \$150,000; as the bicentennial year approaches, we are reevaluating the reality of the situation.

With the essays of our book collected, our bicentennial will be honored in in some form. YpsiWrites has collected the memories of Ypsilanti's admirers, and they will be given an archival home. Additionally, with a host of established events held annually, the Bicentennial will doubtfully pass unnoticed.

Today, we celebrate the Ypsilanti that we know: the citizens that reside here and those that hold fond memories of the community that has taken shape in their lifetime. Though our community holds a colorful past, and one that cannot entirely be characterized as pleasant, we are given this opportunity to take pause. We will take this time to consider the community we would like to see take shape in the coming fifty years, one hundred years, and beyond.

About the Author

Evan Milan is a graduate of Eastern Michigan University with a Bachelor of Science in History. Beginning with the commencement of his first semester at the university in 2012, Evan has lived in and around Ypsilanti. Joining the Ypsilanti Historical Society in 2018, he has served on the Board of Advisors since 2021. Evan served as Chairman of the Bicentennial Commission in 2022.

Bicentennial Sponsors

The Ypsilanti Bicentennial Commission would like to thank the following sponsors for making the celebration of the city's 200th anniversary—including the publication of this book—possible.

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